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CAPTAIN SMITH AND COMPANY

TO MY SON, DAVID

"This is a record which should be written for a son: a note of admonition, the picture of a culprit in his own pillory, a fragment of personal history, a comment of genealogy."

Books by
ROBERT HENRIQUES

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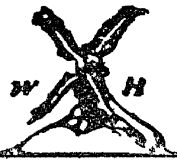
CAPTAIN SMITH AND COMPANY (1943)
also published in America under the title
THE VOICE OF THE TRUMPET

NO ARMS, NO ARMOUR (1939)
DEATH BY MOONLIGHT (1937)

CAPTAIN SMITH AND COMPANY

By

ROBERT HENRIQUES



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PUBLISHER'S NOTE

A GOOD book should not be improved by an introduction; but in this case a note is necessary to warn the reader that the writer has not been content with the normal channels and conventions of fiction. For it is the author's belief that the craft of writing "may permit the grammatical and sensible use of words in any form, or combination of forms, apt to convey the impression of intense feeling." Thus, in the vision or reverie of dying, experienced by Captain Smith after falling to a bullet on a foreign beach, the media of poetry, verse, metrical prose and "straight" prose are in turn sought and intermingled. The technique, the construction, is as much that of the stage or screen as of the novel; though it can nowhere be specifically classified for it is always personal and in itself significant, devised for the particular passage and the particular emotion that has to be recorded.

The impression of reverie is maintained throughout by the compound of allegory and plain descriptive writing, meditation and action, which becomes the narrative. There is the allegory of peace and war seen as the valley which the men have left behind and the mountain to which they were summoned by the voice of the trumpet; there is the allegory of the trumpet whose call, the voice of authority and discipline, is forced through the lips of one character after another in the chain of subordination. There is, further, a certain deliberate confusion of the first and third persons coupled with an absence

of anything more than superficial characterisation; for each soldier represents not only himself as an individual but also *a* soldier, or *the* soldier of all history, called into the mountain ranges of war. With this same purpose the author has used his own personal, emotional language throughout: "I am talking of a corporal's home in a small suburb," he says, "but it is the home of *a* soldier and therefore may be most accurately and keenly described by *me* in terms of *my own* Cotswold valley."

By these methods, and by his technique generally, the author implies that certain unusual demands—none of them particularly exacting—may be made upon the reader, or rather, that if the reader will collaborate beyond the ordinary requirements of fiction, a more truthful impression can be more sincerely evoked. "Read on," the writer implicitly asks, "and at the end stand back to review the picture as a whole in the way that you would look at a landscape." Or again: "read on, listening as you might to orchestral music, hearing the repetition of the motif and its variations, taken by one instrument after another and by the full orchestra, for the sake of the emotional excitement and satisfaction contained within the harmony of the whole theme."

For if the book is to be regarded as a whole and complete unit of art—and we believe that it may be so regarded—it is as a work of impressionism in which the writer, adopting every legitimate device of literature, has striven to record more vividly and sincerely something which has been the subject of his keenest experience. And in this fashion the story has been built up in the odd moments of waiting for battle, in the intervals of tranquillity that divided spells of action, and in the early morning hours that followed a long day in a Whitehall office. For this book has been written in curious places:

in warships, at Scapa Flow, on the North Sea or the Atlantic, waiting at Dover, in chambers in Albany, in a mountain bivouac. This sort of life, this sort of writing, is bound to deny the accepted conventions of literature, for it needs a technique that will meet both the urgent demands of a living experience and the restrictions of a crowded, and sometimes adventurous, activity. Before now, a work of art and a new form of expression, have been born from just this sort of compromise.

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THE BRIDGE

THIS was again a battle, if only a trivial affair, no more than a raid beginning and ending in an autumn night. But in spite of its predestined brevity, a man was once more irrevocably committed: there could be no withdrawal until events had followed their unknown sequence to a certain conclusion. For this crest was foreign soil uprising from a foreign beach; that valley, laid before them in the night, enclosed beneath its mists a target of adventure, the wide-flung arches of a handsome bridge; and all around were men of curious hate who could not be conceived as men of similar flesh, for between the heart-beat here upon this hill and the impulse there in the lower darkness of the vale, lay a casual matter of survival and the intimate issue of death.

The moon which had risen in time to cast from pale sand dunes the dark silhouette that had aided an eastward landfall, and whose rising had dictated the timing of this project—from inland departure, through embarkation and a sea passage, to the quick crunch of beached craft and a leap into waist-high water—this moon now hung half-an-hour above the horizon on the far side of the valley. From the river that wound in ample leisure through this spacious valley, a mist rose and lay in gentle billows, reflecting the moonlight, hiding the plain. And as the darkness was immodestly stripped by the clutch of a burst starshell and by the strayed fingers of a few searchlights, the mist beneath this artificial glow covered more closely than before the wide road and railway that followed in severe curve the diversions of the river and swept at length to a dark and noble bridge whose unseen

arches, flung across the whole width of the hidden valley, were to be split asunder by explosive and dropped into the smooth waters that they incidentally spanned.

Smith said, "Wait," and pressed himself into the earth of the hillside until he was surely part of the hill, and thence looked into the valley whose shadowed contents were the climax of his quest. "Wait," he said to the man with the automatic gun who lay beside him; and meaning as he said it "don't fire back" and knowing that this was a right decision, he allowed his command to repeat itself silently, as token of some sort of power and wisdom that still remained, still intact, a source of comfort and sustenance during the long minutes that they had to wait and wait among these stunted bushes, held in the night and veiled in the slight mists that rose from the valley, lying behind this negligible crest which climbed from the sea to overlook the river and railway—the railway, the river, and the girder bridge that carried the one and spanned the other.

Each event in the sequence he had planned was tied to the passage of a laden minute, to a fragment of time that had to be spent tediously for him but momentously for his men who were working below enfolded in the darker shadow of the defile, hung beneath the mist on the dark span of the girder arch. This inactivity and its need to retain the tranquil mind for an instant that would in its time demand decision, this was the tension and torsion of courage, strain and stress that caught at the breath, groped at the stomach of a man, fumbled at his heart, and left the loins trembling. After a time the silence here and the noise there, the silent waiting and the crack and clatter of starshells and machine guns, the cut of passing bullets, became too great a burden to be carried alone. For the sake of his courage Smith could not continue to wait in the unshared and hostile medium of this immediate silence. "Any news?" he asked, for

the sake of speaking. "News from the beaches?"

"All right," the sergeant-major said. "The searchlights are on the craft of course; they seem to be getting it. But they're all right."

"They're all right," Smith repeated. "So we needn't worry that the whole coast seems to be awake. Awake, aren't they," he said, "right along as far as you can see in either direction?"

The noise was increasing and it was necessary to raise the voice, to shout. The starshells burst in quick succession, the sky permanently lit, the country laid with a white radiance rhythmically heightened and depressed.

"What's the time?" Smith asked. "Time must be getting short," he said and twisted at his wristwatch.

"Plenty of time, sir," the sergeant-major answered. "There's no need to worry yet." It was as if he soothed a child and banished the shadows of a fire that lingered in a dark bedroom. "Plenty of time," he said. "No need to worry."

At these times when time was supercharged with action and passion, when the passage of time was a currency inflated beyond calculation, it was possible and needful to believe at last, as a last refuge and a final creed, that man had power to outstrip the dimensions and elements that were built for his imprisonment, that he was more than human, that perhaps, after all, he was made in God's image. Man was indubitably good, for this, his goodness, was his only defence. And man could look into the heart of his neighbour to seek and to find a quick refreshment of his own courage. And beyond courage, with its every refinement of heightened faculties and mental calm, its inconsistent honour and illogical loyalties, its gaiety, humour, personal passion and impersonal resolve, there was nothing except a void and the precipice of fear. Men, precariously balanced athwart the suction of this fearful void, stood shoulder to

shoulder mutually braced against the passage of events. And events passed on with the predestined violence of a momentum given them by man in the first dangerous flip, almost the snap of a finger; that instant perhaps when the craft grounded on a foreign beach, or that hour when the men filed into the craft in the still evening of an English harbour; or even before that, in the last ten minutes of a long morning conference, when the charts were first unfolded and an elderly gentleman leant forward to inscribe a circle with a gold pencil and to send for Smith.

From these slow beginnings the sequence of this event that was now passing, the measure of those moments which had already fled, the contents of this cruse which held the potion of men's courage and experience and the product of their thought, theories and arguments, all were fatefully determined. Brick by brick, fragment fitted to its counterpart, by chemical reactions of a man's qualities, by chilled reason and the counterpoise of time, distance, terrain, the capabilities of machines and weapons and the calculated probabilities of natural elements: by all of these, this event had been contrived, had come to pass. Man was moved from square to square and brought to this perilous height where only the qualities of man could prevail in frailty against the momentum of what he had fashioned. And thus this creature of sudden violence that had been brought to life from a wedlock of risk and reason must, in its maturity, be held on the light reins of human qualities, on this sensitive courage, on that pride in the image in which man found himself. And from the image that man now saw beside him, a soldier beside a soldier, man was curiously good. And man was grateful for this curiosity.

Smith was grateful, for instance, for the power and compassion of the sergeant-major who lay at his left hand; for the sensitive, nervous strength of Barnes, the

communist corporal, who manned the gun on Smith's right; for the loyal frailty (transformed sometimes into that fierce incongruous strength of a weakling's urgent will) of Hunt, the waif of a casual slum who now lay huddled close to Barnes, ready to feed his gun, brave for no reason except that some strange fuel had been put to unnatural courage. Hunt, Barnes, the sergeant-major, and Jones, who was in charge of those men working below upon the hidden bridge, and Robinson, Murphy, Owen, Brown and many of the company, were old and established comrades in this somewhat flippant diversion of war. It had been a long partnership.

Even at this moment, a snowscape of steep-sided fjord and Norwegian mountain, inland harbour and scattered township rocked by demolition, deep blue waters and icy cloudless sky, a scene peopled by this same company, hung in clear remembrance above and behind this immediate adventure of channel beach and less romantic dunes. Before now (Smith could gratefully remember), Hunt and Barnes and the sergeant-major had suffered with him the constraint of these slow minutes. And from these three men for whom Smith had to feel affection, there came the strength and comfort necessary for this long waiting.

The barrage of starshells hung above them, and a searchlight left the beach to finger along the crest seeking movement. The noise increased until it seemed that on either side, in front, even behind them grew the voice of challenge. From an unlimited source there was the passage of destruction in the air above their heads. Without visible effect but with repercussion it lapped the ear and mind with uneven waves. Through the density of these sullen shocks the ear caught, and from time to time translated to the mind, the quick short bursts of automatic fire and deeper hammer of a pom-pom. These assembled in unreasonable pattern with an

occasional low sombre blast of high explosive.

"Mortars on the beach," said the sergeant-major. And then Barnes clicked his tongue, a slight noise that arose clearly above the persistent tumult to attract their urgent attention. Ahead of them a small red light flickered deliberately an anxious signal; and now that the faculties were caught and directed, Smith and the others could hear through an angry bass of detonation the low whistle that was an agreed recognition.

"Mr. Jones," said Barnes.

"Don't you let off that gun," said the sergeant-major.

From out of the night came a line, a straggle of men. Each as he reached the crest was seen in silhouette, recognized in turn by his familiar walk, his bearing, his peculiar shape or rhythm of movement: Owen, Murphy, Robinson, Brown, and the rest, out of the dark they came, and last of all the large stooping figure of Jones, the subaltern. Jones came back slowly, looming into them until his heavy, pear-shaped face hung cheerfully in the light of the starshells. Behind him the twist of electric cable, the coil of which he dropped beside Smith, led back into the valley.

"Better than Norway," said Jones; "much more fun."

"Get down, sir," said Barnes, for Jones was kneeling beside him; and the subaltern, after he had slipped the rucksack from his shoulders and put down the exploder beside the coil of cable, let himself sink into the scrub.

"One shouldn't smoke?" he asked, but Smith did not bother to answer, knowing that this was the formal jest that Jones had prepared to support his facile courage and to restrain the fear that, even in Jones, was impotent only so long as it was kept in strict confinement. But with Jones beside him, no man could doubt his own personal conquest of this fear that was both his stimulus and his source of paramount danger, more venomous

than the passing destruction. "Mind if I light my pipe?" said Jones, adjusting the exploder.

"We should be thinning out," said Smith. "Send back your party."

One by one the men slid backwards from the crest and stumbled down the hill toward the beach, until there were Jones and the sergeant-major, Barnes and Hunt, those four of them with Smith remaining above the valley.

"Call in the flanks," Smith said. And the sergeant-major, through his fingers and curled tongue, whistled a signal. Men, crawling from either hand out of the darkness along the lateral traverse of the crest, were seen, recognized and sent toward the sea until at last Barnes, looking behind him, said, "The lights—there go the lights," as the red, green and red rockets hung in the air above the beaches.

It was then that the searchlights lit upon the crest and, from quite close, bullets cut across the side of the hill whipping the air above the heads of those five men who still remained. "Too high, as usual," Smith said, testing his voice, measuring in a sort of bravado those taut wires strung through his body, stretching from brain to heart, through every limb to each extremity.

"Is that contraption ready?" he asked Jones.

"We did a beautiful job," Jones said. "Out of the textbook. It seems a pity to waste it."

"Fire the damn thing," Smith said and Jones, kneeling beside him, locked the key into the exploder.

It was not clear then what happened; but Jones appeared to fall forward upon the exploder and at the same suspended instant, a pause of time attached to the red and green rockets that still lingered behind, the earth moved upwards beneath them, the earth ahead moved into the sky, the world was held in one single fan of white fierce light that threw upon the crest a mark of

torrid silence. Through this unnatural quiet the machine guns still tapped gently with timid fingers on the pane of a frosted window.

A PAUSE UPON THE BRIDGE

At the blow which struck Smith down from the crouching attitude to which he had risen, all senses quickly fled. He was aware only that the finger had pointed to him, beckoning, touching him quietly. "You," said the voice behind the finger.

"Not me," Smith cried soundlessly, lips still, heart silent, spirit fluttering within a desperate void in search of light, a beacon, gleam of hope or promise for its attraction. "Others," he cried, "each in his turn but not me. Not mine the choke of blood, the blinded eye, dulled ear, the stifled breath, still hand, and this steep fall through torrents of darkness. Not me, not me." And then, as his courage returned or as some new spirit entered to harry victorious fear, he was filled at last with intense fatigue and the sense of fulfilment that precedes rest. Terror, despair, hope were gone. There was only exhaustion and a tranquillity in which the peace that surpassed a man's understanding was scarcely incomprehensible. "Am I dying, am I dead?" he now could ask with impersonal curiosity; and now could note the skilful fingers fumbling at his field dressing, and at his battle dress, the pressure of a pad, the restriction of bandage, punch of a needle, whispered order; words far distant of command and exhortation merged with phrases of a further past. Scenes and arguments had lost their sequence: "He'll do," said the medical orderly, "just a chance." "He'll do," said his father finishing the rabbit hutch. "Just a chance," said Barnes as he blew at

a sullen fire on the rain-soaked side of a mountain. "Not a chance," said Smith himself as the fish leapt before plunging to the weed-beds of a Cotswold stream.

Then was the world made plain with passion easily discerned, with argument cut down to the root of its discontent, with hopes slanting through the cumulus of passing fear. All was plain beyond the lucidity of speech, beyond the comprehensive limit of the painter's brush, beyond even the power and depth of stringed music.

All was so plain and clear that to Smith, lapped in this escape from hurt, it was apparent only by a process of transmutation into terms of his own passionate urge. All was so brilliant, each detail of such importance, that it defied objective description. The longings of an ignorant Hunt, the compassion of the sergeant-major, the quick argument of intellectual Barnes, the cool disclosures of Jones, the feelings, words, acts, prayers of these men were at last evident to him as identical with all that he himself had suffered, said, done and pleaded; identical, and thus expressible only in identical terms. The thought behind their words was more clear than winter sunlight; so clear that the words themselves became confused, strange and lost to re-emerge as words that were his own. For only his own words and the recollection of his own heart could suffice in clarity to record the passion of his friends. Each man (it seemed to Smith), each one a soldier, was similar and interchangeable, each was in tune; the reactions of all could be played upon the single instrument of his own expression. "When I speak of my Cotswold home," said Smith, "I speak of the northern fell that belongs to Jones, the corner of a slum that is Hunt's, or the elegant chambers of Corporal Barnes. For each one of us," he added, "has left the valley of peace to climb upon the mountains of war, to suffer its rigours and rebukes as the man upon the

mountain is battered by the mountain wind, distressed by the steepness of the slopes, and lashed by the icy mists."

PEACE AND WAR

And as he lay wounded with his friends upon the crest that overlooked a shattered bridge, his ear recalled the words of jest and argument, order and rebuke, that were the milestones of their wartime travel. Now and again all words, all personal speech, were engulfed and silenced by the high-placed trumpet that spoke with the voice of authority through the lips of a soldier set above soldiers; the same trumpet that had rung through the valley to disturb uneasy peace. And as Smith and the others lay before death among the stunted scrub of a foreign ridge, his eye, and the eye of his heart, reviewed the kaleidoscopic scene of recent adventures, peering through the lens of his own experience at the passions and actions of his friends, flitting from one to another and lighting again and again upon the idle days of the valley that was peace, or upon the sorrows and tedium of the hill that was a time of war. From the mountain range, the fearful heights of battle, sorrow and separation, he looked with his friends upon the valley of peace that they had left behind them.

It was a sunfilled wistful valley that enclosed a river enfolded in clustered elms and chestnuts. The waters were bright between the meadows, and a garden flowed from a grey house to rich pastures. From the walls of the valley rose strange mountains newly apparent behind a familiar home. And from the mountain peaks a brazen voice called to curious human figures, elongated or swollen, with features scarred in unnatural shadow,

who went about their natural tasks in the fertile and familiar plain. All these people, none of whose faces were entirely strange to Smith, lifted their heads to the brazen voice from the mountains.

"What's on?" Smith asked.

"Some talk of a concert," said Clare, his wife. "We shan't go, of course."

"Fall in for the concert," said the sergeant-major who was strolling in quiet meadows.

"Concert?" said Jones, "the evening rise is just starting."

Corporal Barnes walked onto the terrace, his white shirt reflecting the evening sun as he waited for dinner. Private Hunt shuffled up the drive in a furtive manner.

"A box of matches," he said to the corporal, "a box of matches for the charity concert."

And then Smith saw himself strolling in the orchard between trees laden with ripe apples. It was clearly a fine September evening, the sun resting in the valley, bathing the uplands, shining upon the great cities from whose prosperous buildings and ambitious spires its rays were brilliantly reflected.

Throughout the purlieus of this happy and prosperous plain, the cities and valleys of abundance, people went peacefully though uneasily about their tasks and enjoyments. They raised their heads to the voice that spoke from the mountains announcing the concert. But when Smith raised his eyes it was to note a fine strip of yellow, red and russet plumes, shot with orange, a bed of dahlias. "You might call that," he remarked, "a nice splash of colour." He walked across, his brain busily occupied with its previous exercise, for a further examination of his flowers. Then, lifting his eyes to the hills, he left the garden.

THE CONCERT

"ALL the peoples," said Smith, "of all the valleys where the pasture is sweet and plentiful and the crops abundant, were asked to a charity concert in aid of the next generation. No expense nor effort was spared to make the occasion both a financial success and a social triumph; a sequence of noble peers and the owners of chain stores and heavy industry were to conduct in turn an orchestra of unique size and splendour, composed exclusively of those who had contrived to make their names familiar to the public; a formidable list of patrons had been advertised in every fashionable paper; and the most lovely ladies in the land, garnished by Hartnell and Antoine, Chanel and Arden, were to dispose of the tickets, sell programmes and show the audience to its seats. An illustrious committee had thought of everything, everything that would draw the men from their toil and the women from their chores, everything except to provide musicians for the making of the music. Neither Sir Henry Wood nor Sir Adrian Boult were there to call the wood-wind from the wings of morning or the strings to evening twilight. Doctor Malcolm Sargent was not invited to beckon the drums with a delicate gesture and incite the cellos to a lifted finger. Toscanini had gone to America, and Barbirolli was not required to point his baton to the skies and draw down the brass in summer thunder. Nevertheless, a detachment of trumpeters was borrowed from His Majesty's Household Cavalry, and a sensible man from the Midlands resigned his prosperous directorships in order to conduct the band. After some delay and several postponements, he tapped with determination and pointed his baton to the skies. At his ponderous signal a splendid fanfare rang through the plains.

The noise of the trumpets roused the people who sprang from a stock that had stood at Agincourt, marched to Corunna and charged at the Duke's command. The mud of Flanders had scarcely dried upon their fathers' boots, but they fitted them on and laced them tight, prepared for a wet evening and a dirty night.

"They might have thought of it a bit sooner," said one to another; "we could have had the boots nailed up and given them a rub of dubbin."

"Smith, a man you might call a gentleman-farmer," (said Smith) "was walking round the garden of his Cotswold home when the first notes of the trumpets broke clearly upon a warm valley and shook the willows which enfolded the Cotswold stream. But at the moment, Smith, who was also a gardener and a poet, was admiring his dwarf dahlias and composing a sonnet about a winter's night. At the first brazen blasts he forgot the sonnet, took a last look at the dahlias and went into the house to search the cupboard under the stairs for his boots and equipment.

"It was eighteen months later, or more" (said Smith), "before the pattern became really apparent. More than a year of impatience, frustration, despair, sorrow and fear had passed before, in the evening of a day in May, this man Smith left the Whitehall office, called a taxi and told the driver to hurry at his best speed to catch the Cotswold train from Paddington Station."

MAY MORNING

COMING then to the dark business of Paddington Station, to the outer fringe of that particular London which was his own familiar environment, this man Smith was loosed at once from his London experience. This, the grim and yet maternal station, symbol of both captivity

and release, seen from the west as the rat trap entrance to the motley of club and office, of mild entertainment and moderate debauch, was as well (when seen from city imprisonments) the narrow exit to his western freedom. Hence, from this gateway, one came to the streams of tranquillity, the hardy hillsides risen to the curves of upland crest, the braver winds of flowing upland plains. Smith, standing eagerly in Paddington Station, standing joyously on the crest of plains and looking downwards to the valleys that enfolded rich memories and simple hopes, to the brief promise of stately trees and graceful rivers, might have been the angel poised upon a cloud, the hero entering his kingdom, the runner sprung to start his race. Or he might have been a projectile loosed in a flash from the muzzle of its gun, freed in conclusion from the careful laying, the setting and calculations which had preceded the discharge. Smith was soaring upwards at last at the start of his trajectory, on a glorious parabola that would take him through the upper airs to drop to final splendour. The joy of his flight was in every metre of the way. His climax, before he started to fall, hung at some sunny point which he could not yet determine. But the sense of fulfilment did not belong to the climax alone, nor yet to the last descent and ultimate issue, but lay in each living instant, precious because of the memorable past, in the release, in the promise of the future, dark or glowing but anyway momentous.

The bustle of the common man, glum and bashful, edging towards the booking office to buy a ticket, the press of the stout and the wizened, the robust and the frail, the languid insolence of the man behind the bars, the surly porter and the portly guard, all this, the throng of common life within the smoky dusk, was refreshing as a stream into which the tired walker dives cleanly and hopefully, resolved to find refreshment. Here was refreshment at the start of a flight. Everything began here;

and behind him, behind the officer pushing his way to the Kemble train at Paddington Station, were the tedious months of disillusion and the last fortnight of plans and preparation.

Behind the projectile was the powder, gone—now that the trigger was pulled at last—with a puff and a flash into the energy of flight. The slightest odour of burnt powder tinged the air with a last memory of all that had hurled a man into adventure: eager recruitment, the abandonment of civil rights, the loss of personal freedom, the rapid tarnish of heroics and spoilage of valour, the marching, stamping, cleaning and repeated exercise, the nostalgic boredom, the false alarms and battered promises, the false starts and false farewells; these, the powder behind his discharge, were gone and given to the living vigour of the hour that at last had come to life. These had led to the unexpected summons and the subsequent hopes and fears, alternating to the oscillations of a promised venture; led to the final fortnight spent amongst the Whitehall buildings, the fourteen days of study over charts and maps, photographs, orders, dockets of intelligence, the turmoil of ceaseless telephones, teleprinters, wireless, fruitless conference, lunches, dinners, drinks, long waits at office doors, brief interviews and lengthy arguments, all the impediment and panoply of modern war. Until at last a miniature battle was prepared and parcelled up, with the moon and tide jig-sawed into what the airman said and what the soldier thought that he could do; put into a parcel all neatly ready and beginning its travels with the journey that two or three hundred men were making tonight from a Northern station, and the journey that Smith, their commander, was now starting in order to join them at a Southern port. But, by the fortunes (for Smith) of time and distance, there was to spare a precious night which he might spend by the fine chest-

nuts and busy stream, between the best sheets in a sunny bedroom, his own bedroom for many years, the room at the end of the passage on the first floor of a Cotswold farmhouse. This was still before him, and also the few remaining days of specific training in the Southern coves, the last preparations, and then the filing into craft by twilight, each man in his proper place and fighting-order, weapons, stores, equipment, each item checked, each detail learnt and repeated; thence to the short sea passage and the foreign beach, the wire and tracer of the enemy defences, fear and confusion resolved by order to the end of battle, the calm moment, pressed exploder, instant mutter grown in one swept flash to the final demolition. And then, if that was not the end, the dawn withdrawal to a slow escape of tension, loss of balance: first a gradual dropping from the heights, a slither, a stumble, and a quick hard fall, back into nothing. But this was not believed, for it seemed then that the end must be the end, and that nothing could follow with decency the blinding thunder of its ultimate release. There was a strange resignation contained in this living hour.

And all this, even the immediate future, was now far distant in improbability, as firmly remote as the Whitehall farewells and good wishes of an hour ago. The future and the past had lent to the present all that they owned or hoped for; had set the present in overwhelming glory. Between the night behind and the sunrise ahead, there was this flowing interval of precious twilight. The night had ended at a Whitehall doorway. The sunrise came with the flash of a demolition.

The common man was good to jostle on a station platform. The tumult and business of trains, the jest and surly silence, stolid shuffling along and edging about, smell of sweat and oil and cheap perfume, these were honest things within a man's understanding. And in

the crowded first-class carriage, in the smell and sanity of third-class travellers, all amongst the goodness of common men, the cleanness of their stubborn decency, their firm resolve to travel more comfortably in war-time than the regulations permitted, than they were prepared to pay for; next to an old soldier of the last war, opposite the mother of his comrades, crowded amongst the different kin of his friends who knew their rights and his, and looked after both of them; alongside the man in the know who could tell a thing or two if he wanted to, the farmer who didn't believe it and found the war all right, the man who couldn't get taken, who couldn't get passed by the doctors; pressed into a corner seat by a stout lady, quite insistent and not to be denied, a lady who said that he did more marching than she did and he ought to get the weight off his feet for an hour or so, and besides he got a first-class ticket from the government, and well he'd earned it, and she'd only got in by accident and he mustn't mind her anyway with two sons in Libya and a third in North Wales and nobody at home to worry her; sunk in that precious gift of a seat that he wasn't allowed to refuse, between the darkly shaded lamp and the last light of day that grew as the train pulled out of the station, he knew that this was the end of a long night, the train rumbling through the growing darkness towards a dawning adventure.

The train travelled slowly, past Slough and Reading, Didcot, Swindon. The train was twenty, thirty, forty minutes late, dawdling behind its schedule. Smith was not in the least concerned, for the warm companionship of the carriage was happy, the travel was happy in itself, the present had worth from its own virtue as part of the twelve hours stolen from the brief remainder. This tranquillity now, at the start of the end, had its own indefinable value. With the passing of the precious

minutes, he became more certain that this must be the end, more content that the end should be final. There would be, need be, no returning. This resolved, Smith was completely happy. It was better to write yourself off at the start; then, if you happened to return, it was an unexpected dividend coming as a pleasant bonus. This was the carefree profession, believed sincere, of that passing moment.

The train grunted through the tunnel with wheels groaning as they braked. He took his cap and bag from the rack and waited for the platform to slide up to them. This was Kemble, a little after midnight.

The clouds had cleared and there was a setting moon dropping towards the horizon. There would be a rising moon in the early morning of that Sunday, or Monday or Tuesday or Wednesday, whichever of the days offered favourable weather for the journey across the Channel. The wind now was strong as the taxi came up the hill on to the long straight road that led to Cirencester. There would be too much surf on the beach with a wind like this. And this was the last time that he would drive into Cirencester with the wind on his right cheek and the moon slightly astern, falling from the sky and shaken from the clouds.

"Still short of rain?" he asked.

"We could do with it," the driver answered. "We had a nice drop last night and a shower or two today, but we could do with it."

He wouldn't ever again discuss the need for rain on the road to Cirencester with the moon falling away at his back; the moon riding the wind that blew from the southward, the moon edging sideways into the clouds that ripped across from the starboard quarter. The soft, rough Gloucestershire voice of the driver was precious, treasured with each moment, each incident whose kinship with the past lent it such solemn value.

The church was lovely in the moonlight, crowning the empty street in which the moonlight lay like a morning mist. The streets curled and twisted so that the houses, shallow in this radiance, were closed in before the car, parting to let it pass through, and closing again behind it when it had gone. On the other side of the town, the country behaved in the same manner, a quiet sea, cloven by their passage, gentle and ignorant of the winds that blew above. When they had reached the end of the wood. they turned left, the wind rumbling now at the back of the car, flapping the aged hood. The moon was on their left hand, where lay the source of those even uplands that flowed moderately to the ridge of the Fosseway, over the road and down the easy slopes beyond. The car went faster, for all its years, on this straight stretch of road; and the song of the past and future, that was sung in accompaniment to the present hour, quickened its beat. The wind and the moon and the lie of the land, the wind and the moon and the hands of the clock, the coming of dawn and the surf on the beach: this was woven into the melody of each speeding second, urging into life the curious purpose that it had now been given.

This passage of the high, straight road, along which the taxi rattled at its best speed until it came to the sudden dip by the trees, the dip by the railway, was taken from the past. They were racing the train to the bridge on their way back from the evening cinema; racing the train because Clare said that it was lucky to pass under the bridge while the train rumbled overhead (but now no train had come earlier that evening on the wartime schedule, just as the wartime schedule had picked up Clare and the children and put them three thousand miles away to the westward); yet again they were racing the train, driving the Humber with Clare beside him urging him on; talking with Clare about the

film they had seen, about the children, the garden, dogs, poultry, the new rose bed pruned too hard, but you can't prune them too hard their first spring after transplanting; the pale vestments of the orchard that promised this year a splendid crop of fruit; the grey mare who ought to foal this week; the litter of puppies in the stables. The old years, spent and stored, were now folded back as the Fosseway fled past in the slipstream of moonlight. This was the present and the past, the past and the future, living and dying, so closely woven together that yesterday and tomorrow, life and death, were one and indivisible.

They must climb slowly up the short hill to the low inn at the top where they had to turn right-handed from the main road into the narrow, high-hedged lane leading to the stone barn at the cross roads. And here they turned once more into the still-narrower lane that dropped steeply, twisting and bumping over the hump of the hill until the valley lay below them. It was spread at their feet, a quilt thrown without care lying in the natural folds that graced its fall. The quilt stirred and moved and blossomed into living land. They overlooked its gentle undulations, their eyes resting on the glow that clung to its moist breaths, the slow movements of its life. As they saw it first, a hand was drawn across the strings and a tremor filled the air. At this sweet chord, the movement gestured in hesitation, the rhythm pausing as the sleeper stirred. Once more it settled into rest as they, seeking rest, came down into its life. This immutable vision of tranquillity, the hills enfolding the river, the river feeding the meadows whither men had clustered in cotes of stone dug from the hillsides, the trees flowing through the valley, and the stone roofs shining between the trees, lapped by moonlight: these were the substance of everlasting tears. Man must weep at so much beauty that was lent to

human purpose. Even the wind was stilled.

But man had within him that saving core of cynicism which could reproach him gently for a sentimental heart. He must smile at the tears which sprang from too much joy. He must note the weakness of a mind that bowed to passion, the quivers of a soul that wept at peace. In this moment of capitulation he might open the gates of a conventional life, throw down the barriers of a sophisticated mind, betray the trust of human culture; but as the colours were lowered from their mast, he must admit in full the fullness of his surrender. The order of all that he had been taught, the restraint he had learnt to acquire, made him acknowledge his degradation. He was guilty of bad manners, of the sin of sentimentality, in this abandonment to joy.

No doubt those tired and careful officers of the general staff were still at the office, working long after midnight in the high room off Whitehall beside the Thames Embankment, while he, Smith, dropped into the arms of a valley that held him to her breast. He had returned to familiar repose, come to be shriven before a fine adventure. Within the chapel of night he knelt at the altar of tranquillity.

The taxi went slowly through the green gates and on to the loose gravel, pulling up beside the modest doorway of his darkened home. The house, cut and fitted to the side of the hill and built within the run of its slopes, hung a little above the river to which it was joined by a lawn that rose to a southern terrace. This was the somewhat grandiose title given to the even space, covered with paving stones, which ran beside the long living room, and about which the summer-time life of the family was always centred. One came out by the French window after breakfast with a second cup of coffee, and there one remained, sometimes, for the rest of the day. Here a man put up his fishing tackle, greased

his line, sorted his flies and put his casts to soak. Here a woman combed an unwilling poodle. Here, when the winds permitted, lunch and tea were taken, a visiting writer came to work upon his book, a lady of leisure caught up with her correspondence.

Behind the terrace the house rose in conventional Cotswold lines through mullioned windows to a gabled roof. It was empty now, for Clare and the children had gone to America, and Dora, the only surviving maid, returned each night to her home in the village. The house was never long unpopulated, since its empty rooms were the delight of a billeting officer who filled them from time to time with families sent from the bombed towns. But such visitors could not for long endure the country solitudes and after a while returned to their urban homes. In between its period of habitation, Dora withdrew from their place of safety all those personal belongings which had been stored away, so that the house was now exactly as it had been in the times of peace. Although no dogs came tumbling down the stairs as the front door opened, a fire was lit in the living room grate and a lamp burned upon the piano. There were flowers and foliage on appropriate ledges and tables, the "Gloucestershire Standard" was folded on a stool, and it was only in substance that Clare was not sitting at her desk, with a spaniel scratching on the sofa, a lady poodle curled in her basket beneath the tallboy, and a golden retriever stretched upon the hearth.

This was little different from any previous homecoming, with the children asleep upstairs and the maids gone to bed. For Clare, like himself, seemed never to be truly absent from this home, its furniture and pictures, porcelain, rugs, vases, and ornamental oddments, collected together through many years of covetous reflection. As always, however short his separation. Smith renewed his pleasure in these tokens of the years of

happiness. Carrying the lamp, he worked slowly round the house, to find a fresh delight in each picture and drawing, in the curtain that came from a distant manor, the porcelain plates bought at a famous sale, the Battersea boxes, the family album of snapshots, books, pewter, wooden shields bearing parts of a fox or two (chased across midland fields or local valleys), odd trays and vases, a Japanese man selling a tortoise, an ivory oyster, a Persian jug. There was no order or particular taste, no matching of period or style, in a collection made by whim and fancy; but each acquisition had once been fitted to its place and now seemed fitted forever.

The joy, the tender sadness, of this return to previous delights and assuagement was not impaired by the conscious recognition of his surrender to sentimentality. His weakness was a betrayal of his private honesty; for while his pleasure at this hour was complete and wholehearted, he dared not admit that this was so, and dared not allow the renewal of each bliss to be accomplished without some measure of self-ridicule. He lacked the courage to refrain from blasphemy, to treat as pure and natural the simple happiness evoked by so common a cause. But this recurrence of self-criticism improved the dish with a piquant sauce, the touch of sugar added to a cream cheese, the hot chocolate on a lemon ice. He laughed at the tears provoked by his happiness; and each memory which was restored begat an exquisite pain that he was pleased to suffer.

He sought now the reflections of past happiness in each chattel, whose intrinsic merit was swollen by association. A picture recalled the arguments about its place, about its purchase and the extravagance which it entailed. This *Khang Tse* bowl had meant the rearrangement of a room; that Chinese rug had cost an autumn night upon the road from Ross-on-Wye, a broken car, a picnic in the woods. Standing beside this chest renewed

an old journey; the scents and murmurs of a summer dusk were brought within the house, and on the wings of recollection he returned to Birdlip Hill and stood there watching, hearing the decline of day, sniffing the night that drove into the vale below. It was thus throughout his home: each corner held remembered joy, and in every ornament and trifle was the solace he had come to seek. Whatever its imperfections, this place was the tale of himself. His record was graven truthfully, and that which had been recorded was at last done with. He was now content to go; and if he were to return, there was this awaiting him; a youth fulfilled to be renewed in vigour, a life completed to be lived again. He had done nothing, but he had done enough. In the hands of his fate he was tranquil, for while the world was before him, he had already tasted the best that the world could provide.

A nightlight burned upon the staircase landing, and a fire died in the grate of his bedroom. Pulling the curtains open, he let the moon flow into the room to gather by his bed. That other bed beside him was covered by a quilt, but he felt no loneliness, for the absence of Clare was not emphatic. If he were to return, she would in time return to him; for there was either no future at all, or a future complete as they had made the past. His own bed brought unqualified repose, and he strove now to ward off sleep that he might enjoy for a few more moments the sense of his vincibility. In this bed he was powerless to breast the sleep that swept over him.

He woke incredulous of the cock that crew in the distance. Standing by the window he watched the verge of dawn, the garden covered with a pale mist of the radiance of naked flesh, caught in that long pause between the night and twilight, the pause that was echoed between the twilight and the day, echoed again

before the night could reappear. These, the necromantic hours, belonged to the poet and the sailor and recalled to Smith his trade. Nautical twilight, civil twilight, sunrise: these were the periods of Whitehall calculations, and round these terms was woven Smith's adventure. This recollection came and went, pausing for long enough to frame the naked hour that was pressed to him. This hour was poised within the garden at his feet, lovely in its nakedness and maidenhood, drooping in its languor. A blossom was at the open lattice, the last of the japonica; and the pale ceanothus had bloomed beside it. The mists dispersed their trail from orchard blossoms on the hillside to the river pools whose cluck and murmur hung as perfume in the air. Beside the pool the willows wept into the stream. This limpid world was so completely pure, so full of promise and surprise, wondering beneath its veil at the tears it shed upon the grass, that he was a child again in the childhood of the world itself. The world stretched out arms of wonder, and as a child he stretched out arms towards the beauty of the world. He and the world were twin children, brother and sister, born of the mother who still slept. So clear was this kinship that the cries of the river and the pool, the perfume of the lilac, the glow of the pink and crimson blossoms, were a part of him as he was a part of them. His silent call to the woken sister was echoed in her happy cries and in the soft breaths of morning that were his own. They cried together to their sleeping mother, the unwoken mother of the world: "I call to thee," he cried with words that had no voice: "Silently I call
To the heart that is still sleeping."

A girl stands naked by the wall,
She my sister;

The japonica is done
And the lilac come,
The powder-blue ceanothus
And the wine-shot prunus
And the naked willow weeping.

In the orchard there is morning blossom;
In the river
A veiled kiss to the shiver of the willow
Where the iris shone.
"This and this," she cried,
The naked child,
"Pool and blossom
River and tree,
These are me," she cries.

But day was come
And I was alone
And she was gone with the sunrise.

For then, the unseen sun coming over the lip of the hill where the valley curved below the house, burst upon the mist and set in motion the splendid changes of sunrise. The unseen sun burst upon the garden, shot the mists with gold and swept them away, was caught in the dew, was held within the first early rose, in the purple lilac, upon the wings of a butterfly whose dance was circled on the blossom. The nest-building sparrows were twittering in the eaves, and the elm tree on the lawn was full of birds. This superb instant of a new morning stretching from its sleep was imperishable. It paused at the apex of its spread for a moment that could neither die nor be repeated.

But Smith, even as he breathed with the morning in its rare delight, was never oblivious of himself, of the Smith who watched and smiled upon his antics, who

mocked and pitied the tears extracted by the morning to match the tears upon the grass. Yet he rejected at last his own cynical perception. For it was clear now that the cynical Smith who used the present to mock the future and gravely ridiculed the man stolen by the morning, this was only a false person whom the real Smith trailed behind him. Smith, the real Smith, stayed here in this moment by this window at this momentous pause which he had claimed for ever. He could never leave this hour to which he finally belonged. He felt that in his cupped hands he held the simple heart of Smith and gave it to the morning, placing it within a tomb where its beat would never be stilled, its love could never be broken. In this repose he stayed while the morning flowed past him, so that he was already no more than an incident of the past, incidental to the life that swept into the future. "Thus, incidentally, I cannot leave," he cried: "Thus, incidentally,

I shall forever as ashes and dust
Be left at this hour
In the blossom of morning."

And I shall for ever
Be held in the flower at my window
Caught with the twittering bird
Lapped by the sunburst,
Gently, gently
Wrapped in the woken world.

"And sentimentally:
'My heart,' I shall say
(the passion flowing),
Shall ponderously think and say,
This moment has my heart
In tears to lose this moment passing,
This incident of May.

"So have I set apart
This fragment of a pause
Whose cause for such quick bliss
Is in its going
While I must stay.

"Thus, left behind,
So may I forward glance and may
Caress this fled delight
Whose case I see declined
Within the flutter of an early rose.

"So may I never lose
This dance of a butterfly
Aslant its lilac bloom
In exercise of light.

"So with my sigh
At this bright chance,
The birth of a crystal morning,
I whisper the warning of night,
Of nightfall soon, and I
Soon soon may die.

"And if I die, my dying
Is wrapped in this wedded hour, this day,
This momentary pause of all perfection,
This early bloom,
Catching the breath and holding the heart
Crying:
'Stay, stay, dear heart, where thou art,
My arms about you, my kiss on your brow;
I leave you now
In this thy tomb.' "

He turned then from the window because Dora had come into the room with his morning tea.

"Your train was very late," she said; "I hope you found everything satisfactory?"

"Perfect," he answered.

"It's eight o'clock, sir."

"I must hurry. The taxi is coming at nine."

✧

"Tighten that tourniquet," said the medical orderly.

"He'll lose his ruddy arm," said the sergeant.

"He'll be lucky if he knows it," the medical orderly answered.

✧

THE TRUMPET AND THE MAN

At eleven o'clock on a September morning the trumpet had sounded through the plains and valleys calling their men to the hillside: "A banner of dawn floats on the mountain," cried the trumpet; "a hero strides the mountain looking ahead to the sunrise, to the gleam of spires in the distant valley, to the wide rivers of milk and honey bright in a splendid dawn."

The men took up their coats and laid aside pick and billhook to walk up the mountain. The voice of authority spoke through the trumpet, warning the men that the hillside was steep and the way hard. "But the night is behind you," said the voice, "this is the morning twilight; you are promised a dawn of unequalled magnificence." The men gave no answer but obeyed the summons.

"Walk over the mountains," said the voice; "from their peaks you may gaze eastwards to the fine tomorrow

that I shall plan, shall build for the heroes who trod the mountain."

But the men, or their fathers, who had heard before such brave words of sunrise, made no profession of joy nor offer of loyalty. Silently they started to climb the foothills of the range which overhung their homes. Few believed the promise and none heeded the lure. They looked at the sky and said that it would be a dull morning.

"A glorious morning," said the voice of the trumpet.

"A wet morning," they answered, "dull before seven, clear at eleven. We'll look to the noon ourselves. . . . Yours was yesterday."

The trumpet sounded again, a little cracked and hoarse.

"We're coming," said the men, "save your breath to show us the way; but point it clearly."

"To the sunrise," said the trumpet.

"To our noon," replied the men.

"To my dawn," the trumpet insisted, "For the dawn is my design:

I have spanned the night
I have promised the dawn,"
Said the trumpet,
"My dawn of desire fulfilled,
Of delight restored
To the horn of the morning,
The dawn I have planned, have willed."

"We have reached the night," said the man,
"We have come to the night,
To the flameless fire and the parched tear,
The deaf ear and the silent cries,
We plan for the noonday sun,"
Said the man. "The night has begun.
We want none of your sunrise."

NIGHT was indeed approaching the mountain on whose slopes the men of the valleys, disposed in military pattern, climbed slowly and slowly descended to climb once more towards the further peak. Their bodies were bent forward to ease the weight of pack and equipment, and leant sideways to combat each thrust of the vigorous wind. The men were weary, and wearily journeyed beneath the press of thunderous clouds and growing darkness. Their motion, though slow, was steady and rhythmical. Only this rhythm preserved their forward impetus; and the conscious mind had become a slave to the rhythm of their labour, cowed and crying that they were tired, were weary: "I am tired and tired tonight." Their cry had still the hope of rest, the knowledge that to every labour there is in the end repose. And their conscious negative minds, the single mind of this company, were turned to the tranquil accomplishment whither the thread of their journey drew them: to their only purpose, to this reward of rest. Memory, suspect though it was, beating feebly behind the neutral working of a man's brain, accented the vision of rest, the thing desired and desirable that would come with the end of toil. A gust of wind renewed the sigh of a chimney by the warm hearth, the tap of a creeper on the closed window. The wind, and the rain that came with twilight, brought a cold despair, folding within the barren minds those bright and warm reflections that flickered on the panes of memory, firelight on sweet flesh, firelit repose and ultimate sleep. But the memories discarded these forgotten joys as unbelievable circumstance that had never belonged to them. Minds discarded the past except as a token of all that might never belong to the future. The mind, mistrusting the

seduction of memory as the wiles of an old lover, but finding her desirable, knew only tiredness. "I am tired," it cried: "I am tired and tired tonight
And there is no delight
In your remembered gleam and grace;
But there is place
Within the crook of your arm to rest
My head on your breast
My heart contrite
At my self-pity and my no-delight."

And each step made no apparent progress, nor brought increase of hope. The night grew darker, but not dark by contrast with the lightless passage that their mind must make through the pain and fatigue of this laboured movement. No man halted for, unseen and unbelieved, a figment of the past beckoned in the future, in the memory of a tired dream; "I am tired," they cried but stumbled onwards: "I am tired and tired tonight
For through the tunnelled gloom
There penetrates
No beam of light.
Only the bloom of your cheek
in my dream,
And on my cheek your breath,
Forbid me seek
Estates of death."

No man halted, not only because his memories, deceptive though they might be, made hope unwittingly persist, but because to cease from labour offered no evidence of relief. Nor was he willing to surrender to a tangible foe. The cold, the windy and wet hillside denied repose; and the tiredness of each step had become the enemy and thief of a man's virtue and resolution. This knowledge of an enemy was the true incentive to effort and the call

to manhood. "I am weary, I am languid," they cried, "but I see the enemy and his dark desire. But I am languid, languid,

> Wearied in the night.
> No distant sight reveals
> Nor calmly steals for me
> A dear respite.
> But see! Within the shadows swiftly banded
> The hidden felons of fatigue
> Darkly intrigue."

This then was war, the banner, the trumpet, the hero's panoply. This then was battle, not alone in blood and dust, but in languor and fatigue, no-hope and resolution, windy promise but brave persistence. The villages, one by one, sent their men trailing out onto the hillside while the night fell. The winds blew the garish hopes of disillusioned man and scattered them on the hillside. In the drab sunset there was only the hope of a sullen dawn. The men laughed at the promise of a splendid sunrise but struggled onwards to answer the challenge. "Give us your Bren," a man said in the growing darkness to his more-tired comrade.

SMITH, THE CAPTAIN

SMITH, the captain, hearing the man's offer to carry the gun, looked quickly, listened sharply, and heard with relief that the tired soldier declined the suggestion. The captain, the man Smith, the farmer, the gardener, the poet, but above all the captain, must note each flutter of his men's spirit, each current of despair or resolution that lifted or depressed their wings. And now, lengthen-

ing his stride and quickening his pace, he brought himself to the head of these men where, from just below the crest that they approached, he could watch the company come past. And his men, looking up to the limits of their vision, saw him standing in the buffets of the crest, tall and wide, dark against the fading light and crowned by the heavy clouds that swept across the near horizon; he, the pillar of their trial, the statue of their hope, pedestalled above them, firmly planted at the base of a rock yet balanced in the wind, and braced against the slash of driven rain that cut across his shoulders. Thus exposed to their decision, the Captain, the man Smith, the farmer, the gardener, the poet, called without words and beckoned without gesture to the men he commanded. Because he was the captain, his words must often echo the voice of the trumpet whose brazen call, obeyed with cynical resolve, had drawn them to the hills (and him with them) from the peace of a lowland farm. Because he was the farmer, they knew him to be an ordinary man of predictable reactions, with certain common instincts of greed and calculation which lend the lawns to pasture and the flower beds to potatoes. But because he was a gardener, they judged him to be far-seeing and patient, a person of steady toil and distant view, whose head was bowed but whose eyes were lifted, whose passions were prisoned by his thoughts and whose thoughts were hidden in a private bower. And yet, as a poet, his passions blew the bubbles of his mind upon the public plain; his garden open and his lawns wide, he turned his lifted head to the crying of the present, lowered his eyes into the vision of the past to weep a common tear or share a simple laughter. And because he was a poet, the men thought him fitted in one important respect to be their captain: for his ears had heard the call of the trumpet, quick and urgent; his eyes had seen the first brief flutter of the banner; and

to these symbols his heart had responded with passion, and his mind with bitter revolt; yet he had hastened to the mountain.

"This," said Smith, "is the way that the men should think of me, their captain. This is my dream and my hope; and on the hope of this relationship I must base my conduct and my bearing." He looked at his watch. "Nine o'clock," he said, "a dark hour of an autumn evening."

THE MOUNTAIN AND THE NIGHT

At nine o'clock on the mountain, conditions were hard and the trial severe.

On the steep ascent they dared not halt but must husband the momentum of their climb. Each step, compounded with thought and conscious calculation, the precise reposite of a leaden foot, was in itself a local battle. And yet they must plan always for the step that was to follow, each leading to the next and the next, initiative retained in the rhythm of advance. For at these extremes of endurance, an instant's loss of balance, a slip, a stumble, threatened disaster.

And at the immediate summit there was no escape from freshened winds that swung round shoulders of the crest to whip at hands and faces, to fasten sodden clothes against their sweated limbs. Here at this apex of toil was a concentration of anguish. Man, helpless and pathetic victim of every hostile element, could find no friend, no prospect of relief. Each sore was doubly chafed by every movement; the deadweight of a pack was quickened from dull attrition into active, trenchant aggression on a cringing shoulder; each tortured sinew seemed tightened by yet another turn, to twang in the

wind with its pain of added tension. Exhaustion, pain, despair battered at resolution.

Before them, the steep and boulder-strewn descent beneath the driven rain and wet, but still cold, wind was worse, more naturally hazardous and more exacting than the steady labour of a climb. And beyond the valley there waited another peak enclosed in temporary cloud; and thence descent and peak, with hostile valleys in between, until at last, far distant in the future of toil, the end might come to them quick and unexpected, the rough hillside falling at their feet to the warm and constant plain, the promised rest.

There was yet no evidence that they approached this haven of relief.

THE COMMON MIND

THE men with no prospect before them toiled onwards through bog and wind-torn scrub, and over the sly boulders which strewed their path. Smith, the captain, was tired enough; but it was easy for the leader to show himself more resolute than those who followed, and to persuade himself that the heroic role in which he was cast had endowed him with a hero's measure of strength and courage. He could, and must, forget his own fatigue in anxiety for the company of men, himself included, who must somehow cross the mountain. And as they looked at Smith, to test not his virtue but the virtue of them all, he was able to meet their eye with a reassurance which they returned.

"We do not know where we are going," eyes said to each other, "but we shall get there."

This is said and understood by them, and by Smith, for he, their captain, knows and shares the common

mind, the hopes and fears that are their single heart. Thus he knows Jones, his subaltern officer; the stalwart sergeant-major; Barnes, the communist corporal; Brewster and Hunt, Macdonald and Harper, Murphy, Owen and Brown and all the names that trip off the tongue in the quick moments when a man's mind can scarcely keep pace with his decisions. He knows their thoughts and laughter, the passions behind their jests and the jests in their imprecautions. He knows their trades and their circumstance, their childhood and their youth, the women they have loved and the sons they have begotten. And yet he cannot know them either wholly or objectively, for they are seen only through his own eyes, heard through his own ears, and their passions are transferred by his own senses, transmuted to the beating of his own heart. "I know them as brothers," says Smith, "each as a twin brother of my own whose ways have diverged from my own, who has slept under different stars. But our hearts have a similar beat," he adds, "the pulse of our blood is a single stream; and the words that come easily to the one of us, from the dictionary of the dale or the grammar of the city, would not be inept from the other. This sergeant, this corporal and I, and this private, are equally moved to laughter and share an average sorrow. We are ordinary men, this one and I, loving and hating, hoping and fearing with like passions but at different speeds and various pressures. And try as I may, I cannot know the pressure and speed of his joys and sorrows. Thus I can only know them as I know myself, they in me and I in them; but yet I can know them well, for we are all soldiers upon a mountain and slaves of the trumpet.

"If I speak of any one of them, I speak of myself, making no accurate copy of their words and thoughts and their specific actions; but giving, nevertheless, the broad sketch, the melody, the rhythm of all that they

suffer and hope. If I talk of my own familiar stream where once I lingered, the words that come may describe with felicity the suburban bower of this sergeant, the northern dale of that man who carries the Bren, the rich apartments of Corporal Barnes, or even the slum tenement of Private Hunt, for each is the house of a soldier. And if any man speaks of his girl or his child, he speaks for the rest (for our girls and our children are pitched in harmony, and no one can know which one he talks of the wooden panel that he carves in the winter evening, the model ship that he builds in a bottle, his pigeons, his dog, his stamps collected in a book, the butterfly set on a board or displayed in a cabinet, I hear from him words that tell of a hackled fly cast with precision on a clear stream, or of long hours spent with a trowel in the hidden bed of a small garden. Our voices are pitched in harmony, and no one can know which one of us carries the burden of the song at any specific moment; or even which one of us sings, and which is silent.

THE RECOLLECTIONS OF JONES

"In this way," said Smith, "I know them as they know me. I know Jones who is leading the right platoon, away out on the steep flank of the company. I can see him now, even in the gathering darkness, leading the way with his peculiar gait and easy resolution. Even in the twilight, I can detect his broad shoulders that lightly support his burden, the large fair head of the countryman, tall stooping figure, feet turned out, and the slow, steady rhythmical pace of his climb. All his movement swing into each other; for this man has found the rhythm of life, and wherever he is and whatever he

does, he recalls the rhythm he lived in the valley and tunes to it the beat of his present experience. On this mountain, in the ship that brought us to this mountain, in the other ships and sterner seas (for Jones has seen more battles than most of us), his inner thoughts fly, and fled always, to his own plains; and his next and outer thoughts, in the concentric circles of a mind, ponder the recent past; while the superficial thinking, and the contrivance of his brain and experience are busy with present complexities. He is indifferent about the future.

"I know the thoughts of Jones at this very moment as the wind turns icily this shoulder of the hill. His eye casts upwards from his lowered head to pick with skill the less steep way that he will climb; his ears listen to the passage of the men he leads, catching the stumble or the awkward step; and his practical mind considers with steady calculation the stamina of Hunt, the sores and blisters of Harris, the chances that Taylor will not survive the night. But at the inner core of his mind, in the pivot of his circling thoughts, he dreams with hot desire of a cold morning and a waning moon upon the frosty fens, of the geese winging over in silent arrow, and the dive of teal to the hidden water. And between these two thoughts, his dreams and his contrivance, he ponders with full consciousness the recent past, his latest adventure, disputing each detail, weighing and reviewing each trivial event and circumstance, testing and choosing, rearranging in a new display the big and little things that have now passed to experience. Of these things only, of the things that happened since he took to the mountain, he talks with unrestrained interest. I know them," said Smith, "not only as we know each other, but because we heard them so often in an evening's rest. But I cannot know the tempo and beat of his fears, or the heart of his desire. For since I

have never waited at morning for the coming geese, or listened for the whistle of mallard and the dive of teal, the nearest I can get to the innermost dream of his mind must be the dream of my own valley."

"It started and ended" (thought Jones as he picked with care his way up the mountain), "that day in the Whitehall office. There the plans were made, and there we returned when the exploit was over."

"But I am aware," said Smith, "that it started long before that, on twilit fens, in the wait for geese on a cold morning; or for a less literal and more truthful translation, in the warm folds of a Cotswold hill. And there it will end, in the flat stillness of the fens, or, in my own language, by the side of a Cotswold river."

PURPOSE IN NORWAY

NEVERTHELESS Jones still believes that the start of that particular adventure into northern waters, undertaken a year or more before the night that led them to a channel beach and thence to sand dunes and the shattered bridge, was in a solemn Whitehall building high above the Thames, "for" (as Smith himself can now recall) "it was there that we were first shown the small-scale chart of Norway with a blue circle round the Fiord, the island and the fortified pimple islet set off at one corner."

"All events," Smith is now saying, "that accumulate in their just order towards a climax, be it logical or paradoxical, form themselves into a tale with that mark of inevitability which is a requisite of fiction." But we had been involved in too many of these projects, so often still-born, to be able to find and enjoy, during all the preparatory stages, the high excitement of adventure

and the illusion that the real had become fiction, that a story was growing and that we were growing into a story. The feeling that one is creating a news paragraph —much less a brief sentence in history—is never enjoyed as a current experience. The business is on too small a scale, the demands of detail too pressing, the conjunction of detail too difficult for there to be anything thrilling or romantic about it until it is all nearly over. Besides, during the five weeks of planning and thinking about a raid which lasted about five hours, we were too tired and busy to be able to do more than keep up with what had to be settled and arranged, and to get in our push on our own particular spokes each time the turning wheel brought them past us.

But in retrospect, although it is still much too soon for the story to be more than in an early stage of gestation, the little affair is already becoming pictorially complete and sensually lucid. One's feelings were, as always, cumulative; and this time they were let run the full parabola of their trajectory, were brought to a sort of fulfilment and were, for once, not knocked downwards by that wicked sense of frustration and anticlimax which is as bad as anything that a soldier has to suffer.

The raid was only one of a number of minor transactions which kept us extremely busy, and made us excessively tired, during the months of early winter. All that time we spent in ships; and for five weeks on end I never set foot on dry land, so that the thought of firm, living earth with its kind stability became something immensely desirable. We lived sometimes in the very biggest ships, and sometimes in those which were much too little. We moved between them (but not on my account) with honour and dignity, carried in admirals' barges, greeted with the pomp of arrival and departure that the Navy so admirably maintains

in the middle of a major war. We dined with the great and were squeezed into corners alongside the hammocks of the humble. I was always in the wrong place, wrongly dressed, doing the wrong thing and enjoying the free-est hospitality, drinking at the expense of others, accepting their sacrifice to enhance my own comfort. And all the time we were treated with a special sort of traditional kindness of such a warmth and consideration that at last we began to understand how much sea-power depends upon good manners, and how the ceremonies of ordinary living build up the discipline that controls battles. But all the same, it is the hardest trial—and one in which I lamentably failed—to be an honoured and graceful guest to a succession of the most generous hosts for a period of five weeks without respite.

Every now and then the ships in which we were living plunged off into the North Sea, sometimes upon their own urgent errands but more often for some purpose in which we had a share. On these occasions, however much the seas broke over our bows and inconvenienced our passage between the quarter deck and the bridge, our plans and calculations had to continue, and our midnight work over charts, photographs and orders had to be carried on in the cramped and pendulous conditions to which sailors grow accustomed. It was interesting but inescapable, important—for lives depended upon it—but very tedious; and quite early on, the effort to repress sea-sickness was over-balanced by nostalgic indulgence. I longed for familiar circumstances in which I had, and knew, my place. For although most cordially accepted as partners in an enterprise, we were but strangers in the ships where sailors had a home of their own peculiar contrivance. It was a home which, by its nature, was so unadaptable, so much designed for its own single purpose and so little for ours, that we (the home and the soldiers) became

mutually irritant. There was nothing notably wrong, but a succession of small incompatibilities made a conservative landsman feel that he and his surroundings were not concordant. He seemed to be dependent upon so much that was independable. He was ill equipped and somewhat defenceless against the inherent limitations and demands of a busy warship. Our clothes, for instance, were unsuitable and insufficient for the alternating rigours and ceremonies of the sea; our disagreeable office habits of collecting files of orders, instructions and information were frustrated by a shortage of horizontal places on which to put them; we were always hatless at times when manners demanded that our heads be covered; while hats were inappositely in our hands when there was no obvious cranny for their concealment. We were frequently anxious to journey between decks just after the watertight doors had been secured; when we wished to sleep, loud-speakers broadcast interminable boatswains' pipes and curious ejaculations; when we needed a clerk or a servant he was usually involved in a strangely-timed repast. No word or look of reproach or mockery was ever returned to our trespass or misadventure, but we could not be unconscious of our own defects. We were savage chieftains, in our comic frock coats and high hats, received in civilisation by the Political Officer in his shorts and sleeveless tunic.

Surrounded and welcomed by men who were fostered by the sea, we strangelings were rejected by this element. From the bridge of a destroyer the mountain of a wave became a sad parody of a Cotswold hillside. From the deck of a battleship the flat northern coastline, beaten by the end of seas, was not the same sort of land as our own sun-warmed, rain-kindled valleys. The clatter of a cruiser in a gale roused desire for the lowing of cattle; and the sort of chanting that the winds make to a cabin

in the forward superstructure, evoked an appetite for the comfortable village noises that steal by night over a long, quiet distance. Feelings were paradoxical, for while one could not help thinking that it would be fine to be a sailor, one was forced to remember that a landsman was designed for terrestrial stability with a passion for flowers, grass and friendly rivers.

It was quite early on in our northward journey that the unpredictable moods of the sea—which seemed to leave us always one beat behind the music and a semitone flat in the maritime descant—began to form their own alien rhythm. At first it was as purportless as Eastern music to the untrained ear of the West. Misleading and contrary, it would flinch from the logical climax, leading us to an offer of repose in order to plunge once more into violence, renewed and hostile. It took us up the staircase, like a fragment of a Bach fugue, to divert us down again, two steps from the top when we were reaching out for the landing. It poured out vinegar from a port decanter, and offered us salt from a bowl of sugar.

The tune, too, was strange and reminiscent of no familiar sentiment; its beat was awkward and confusing. The land that we sighted, approached and lay beside was not a terrain that we could accept with cordiality. Snow-covered mountains we knew, and their lower wastes of frozen upland; in many countries we had seen the little plots of tillage stolen from the windy desolations, but we saw them again from a new angle. Whereas we were used to gazing seawards at the grandeur of a ferocious phenomenon, we were now a part of that ferocity looking with envy at the passive land. We sought in memory for similarities but found only contrasts. The sea-travels of our past had been transitional, with the land as their climax and purpose; our sea-going now was concerned no more with the land, except for the shelter it pro-

vided, than with the flight of fish who no doubt meandered beneath us, or the sleek seal who raised a glossy head to blink at our scuttles.

It may be that the inward search for an anchorage that might be harboured in memory, led to a habit of introspection inducing nostalgia. It is certain that familiar circumstances of the past, the well-known twists of a valley, and the well-beloved slopes of a hill, became most vividly superimposed on a sea-borne existence. A soldier was never quite sure whether he was living in a ship and dreaming of home, or living at home and dreaming of the storms of his private fiction. The present and the past were equally brilliant; and while the soldier looked from a warm cabin at the shivering coastline, he sat by a quiet hearth and watched the snow-flecked warships drop anchor in the creek of a northern islet.

Anyway it happened that the syncopations and unrealities of a soldier's sea-going life compelled his seeking brain to discover the rhythm of his new and curious usage. His mind sought the restrictions, the freedom and the code of verse, rather than the liberality of prose. For in every man there is an instinct for a sort of metrical discipline, and to every way of living there is its own peculiar beat which thrusts its echo into the words that fall from an anxious perception: thoughts and passions find words of appropriate texture, colour and key; syllables splice themselves into line, and the lines get reefed into verses, until some sort of poem, however crude and simple, is in the end evolved and woven from all that is passing in a man's subconscious awareness. (No more facile explanation, said Jones in a brief digression, can be given for the making of poetry, whether it be great or trivial, provided it is written with passion and sincerity.) And in the end, from great labour at stolen moments and from casual

scribblings in the pangs of dawn, the lines began to shake themselves into the steady torrents and temperamental gusts of those same relentless winds who had made the soldier captive.

In one little ship whose sudden inclinations seemed irrevocable, verses somehow got scrawled on to envelopes; in other ships where our typewriters were turning out orders to no more than a gentle slither across a tilted table, the old caligraphy was studied, censored, purged and re-written in inaccurate translation. As the catches of song caught up with our momentary emotions and digestive troubles, what we were feeling got turned into what we were trying to say, and words got muddled up and strung together like the beads of a necklace. With the progressive stages of our enterprise, the disjointed stanzas were either consigned to the deep or became soldered with a substance that seemed of their own metal. And at last, as we worked our way through heavy weather by a miracle of navigation to the teeth of the fiord we were seeking, the peculiar lament was very nearly finished. But not quite. For there was a gap, a cavity which the wind would not cease to probe, as the tongue will explore the hollow left by a dentist. An emptiness rendered incomplete a piece of work which, however unimportant, was inevitable, had been undertaken and should have been done to schedule. There was the irritant of omission which no pre-occupation can soothe or banish. A poem had been written, but it wasn't quite poetry, and wasn't quite whole.

It was extraordinary that our meticulous plans were in the end concluded to time and to the last detail. It was unbelievable that the last signal had been made a dozen hours before, that the large scale maps were ready, the domestic arrangements of our headquarters complete upon the bridge, and our silent wireless sets in place to start their conversations with the opening phrase of the

battle. The last sleep was finished, and before the start of nautical twilight we had shaved, eaten, and dressed with jersey over jersey and greatcoat over all. First light was in the sky behind the steep, imminent, towering, snow-clad shores that imprisoned our little company of ships upon a calm and waveless sea as our aircraft passed over us; and almost at once the flashing fire from the sides of the fiord shot its bullets and shells diagonally across the dusk. High above us, on the shelf of an incidental mountain, the lovely, unbelievable, almost-forgotten picture of a lit window, unconscious and unveiled, hung in the morning darkness. For two years we had not seen such a window. The window spoke of peace at the very start of a battle. But none of this was credible. The ships were at their stations, behind us and to one side, with the accuracy described so tersely in the Naval orders. The star shells burst in the sky, and the water-beetles crawled towards the coast carrying our troops and my friends. Our ship quivered as the salvoes left her. Our aircraft roared low over the island, their guns spurting and the smoke bombs dripping as they passed. The messages started to come in; and in reply we issued orders, talked by wireless, searched through glasses to correct the dubious phrase. The destroyers were handsomely busy, and sometimes we caught snatches of the suave voice of the naval commander: "Make to Rastus—'Sink her'" or "Make to Seraph—'Board her.'"

Quite late in the morning, the snow-covered mountains were quickly coloured a violent magenta that started at the peaks, slid swiftly down the precipitous slopes until it touched the water and vanished into toneless brilliance as the sun broke over the crest behind us. This was a curious reminder that we were living and awake, that we played our game within the setting of familiar creation. Nature continued to plaster us with

beauty in the middle of a battle.

Guns were shooting at us again and raising silly puffs of violet smoke in the bright blue water. Aircraft were fighting in the cloudless sky and spilling bombs which raised the spray around us in the superb texture of still fountains. Signals came fast and were answered. Heavy explosions sounded from the shore behind the spasmodic clatter of automatic weapons. Between the radiant sea and sky, the graduations of smoke, oily and black to pale spectral, hung and drifted. Our ship moved gently about, with half of its armament pointed skywards and the rest engaging the shore battery. Then, by some fortuitous conjunction of events, all noise was synchronised for one sudden, disruptive, gigantic movement. Blast, (not what the scientists call blast, but what comes out of the business end of a gun), removed my steel helmet, blew the cigarette from my lips, blew the signal-pad from my hands, left me momentarily awakened. The signal-pad was quickly replaced by an orderly whose job it was to keep me supplied with the stationery of battle; but for the moment there was no work to be done. Without premeditation I let the pencil stray, scribbling what had come into my head—just an idle line or two—at that precise instant when all noise was fused into a single blow of vast ferocity. The sheet got pushed within the layers of my ample clothing, and it was not till I went to my salt-water bath when we were well on our homeward journey, that I found the crumpled message form and saw what I had written. But even at the time I was happily aware that the irritant gap in my construction of the past weeks had been reasonably filled; the tooth was stopped; the job, however worthless and trivial, was complete. As the battle moved to its climax I was filled with delicious repose.

It was curious to discover afterwards that the cause of

a sudden tranquillity was that these words had got themselves written:

> The distant bark of a dog
> And the quick laughter of boys
> Heard through the dark.

They seemed facile and simple enough, and might have been expected to find their way on to paper (if such was desirable) without the assistance of a ton or two of explosives, but they were nevertheless a personal triumph, a necessary conclusion.

We finished the operation and proceeded homewards with our bows pointing towards a fine sunset. After an excellent meal I wrote out a fair copy of the whole set of verses. It was a grand night; but the river that winds in a Cotswold valley was unbelievably desirable. "The sea-going soldier," I wrote:

> "The sea-going soldier
> Far-strayed from the refuge he knows
> Of mute tranquillities
> In the secret hearth defined,
> Now is he fast confined
> In the teeth of an islet harbour
> Whereupon urgently blows a barbarous wind
> Laden with bitter rind of the wind-flung seas.
> Is it this that he minds?
> Or does he find
> In the farthest snow hills
> And in the frozen low hills
> Or in the strayed terrace of shallowed loam
> Or in the mangled shore of wave-crushed gravels
> Or at the ship's side in questing foam
> Or aloft in the angered bard:
> In these, a stranger unkind

Whose hand is against him whose sudden ire
Forbids him a welcome and welcomes desire
for the pleasaunce and sward
of the sun-warmed home
that dwindles behind
the space of his travels:
It is that which he finds?
For the restless seas
Which belabour the sailor
Are home to the sailor,
The home of his choice,
But in the soldier,
The sonorous, clamorous voice
Awakens dis-ease
And a sad contemplation
Of the merry mariner, his rich relation,
And the soldier's lips, if they might, would say:
"Rich sailor, this is your day;
But I, the soldier far-strayed,
Must seek with inward glance
Familiar circumstance.

To such mute message
Soldier and sailor
As the days pass
Converse together,
Chatter of this and of that.
Of the ship's cat
Of the falling glass and of heavy weather
And of the westering wind.
To this, the rich sailor is knowing and kind.
But the soldier's heart,
The eyes of his heart,
Gather tears for the vistas behind
The nostalgic wake of his passage.

For the soldier's heart
Holds in cupped hands
Fear of strange parts,
Of wave-torn lands,
Of tilting hills in whose maternal keep
Are small ships held to swollen breast
but who reject
the strangeling bequest
of a soldier who understands
only a hill that rests
in its pastoral sleep.
And the soldier's heart
Hath eyes that burn with fire
Of the murmurous desire for privacies.
And the soldier's heart
Hath eyes that burn with longing
For the rare repose belonging to his memories.
And the soldier's heart
Hath eyes that gleam with tears
For the touch of fallen years where tides depart.
And the eye of the soldier's heart in-looking sees
Remote reflections of its common joys:
The distant bark of a dog
And the quick laughter of boys
Heard through the dark;
Or the crow of a cock come with the dawn breeze;
And with each the intimate look of another heart.
And the eye of a soldier's heart sadly perceives
The fragile foliage of beloved trees that weep apart.
And the eye seeks inwards again
To a valley drenched in rain
Where the lips cluster by the river.
And the heart must there discover
its lucid pain."

At the moment of this discovery I heard the sharp rattle of the multiple pom-poms, the quick thuds of the four-inch guns, and then my cabin shook as the main armament sent shells into the sunset. I hastened on to deck in time to hear the order to "take cover" broadcast through the ship, in time to see the bombs fall, one on either side of us, and a third almost out of sight in the growing night. The ship shook again once or twice, and then the voice of the man who worked the radio detection said on the loudspeaker that the sky was clear of enemy aircraft. Our bows pointed to the last orange echo of the evening, and overhead the clouds gathered.



"Late, late," Smith murmured.
"What's that, sir?" the medical orderly asked.
"He's a bit daft," said the sergeant.



THE EYE OF THE MIND

"THE mountain," said Smith, "and on the mountain, the clouds grew and closed upon us, swollen and dark with argument. But we did not respond to dispute their statement of despair. For now we stumbled and strove in silence, a new silence, an unexpected danger that had fallen with the night upon our company. Sullen as the dark estrangement which comes between friends when trust has vanished, dull as the hate that follows a betrayed affection, this new silence was no mere absence of casual comment. It forbade speech, denied the spoken truth which relieves the steepest burden. There was no escape in speech from the tiredness that began to fill, to beat down, to seep into the burdened spirit; no release from the tiredness that denied a laden will; no hope nor

promise of release, ultimate release, from this perpetual toil. As the darkness came, so came the silence and the tiredness; and with them the trial of resolution and the prejudgment of failure. The purpose had vanished as the conception of rest receded and failure was immaterial. In the twilight of this imminent and darkening failure, the silent, tired night of defeated purpose, the mind gave to the cry of the body, ceded detachment from the grim mechanics of each wearied, painful move, until the eye of the mind, lifted above the body, looked down upon the dark mountain to the crawling people.

"But this lifting of the mind above the body to an eagle's view-point, was no mystical detachment of power. The mind hung there in the darkness, lost and bewildered, suffering with the body each of its individual hurts. The mind, in its new detachment, had lost the old, the human detachment in which it held sway over its own physical world. It was a paradox that happened with despair, at that desperate moment of fatigue or fear when all circumstance clicked into combination against the human effort. It was paradoxical, because detachment had come but detachment was lost. It must be supposed that detachment had changed its nature, from power to weakness, from conquest to defeat. Man, now bereft of human power, was like a dog over-whipped, out of its mind, cringing to escape each further hurt inflicted on the body.

"This was the mood of cataclysmic defeat when men run and armies surrender without battle. This was the beginning, when man had lost his own mastery and found this dazed detachment in which the mind, no longer a faculty, became a mere consciousness of separate pains.

"Thus we laboured towards the crest, the mind watching our labour, sharing the tension of a thigh that strove to lift the heavy foot whose slow and accurate fall upon

this slivered ledge, this side of rock, this mossy slide, alone foretold the future. From this foot, placed with such careful precision, must come the source of further impulse. From the placing of this foot came the next more painful step towards the crest, and the step towards the dark cloud which was darker than the darkness of ripening night.

"The eye of the mind, from just above our heads, looked down from head to heel upon the anguish: upon the forehead-sweat cold in the wind, the cheeks streaked to the neck with charcoaled sweat, and the neck raw from chafing collar; the eyes sore from wind and tiredness, and pink from dust; the nostrils sore from running mucous; and the lips salt and scaly to the tongue, peeled by the constant wind; the face hot from the wind and cold from the sweat which the wind had dried upon it. There was pain there, and greater pain in the stooped shoulders straining downwards away from the pack, to uplift the pack, opposing it from below to save the sideways pull on the shoulder muscles and the sideways rubbing at the shoulder flesh. And pain in the bent spine, in the small of the back, in the hip and belly skin where the webbing belt rubbed and worried with the working of the pack; pain in the hands which were swollen from their hanging and from the swing of the arms that went with rhythmed movement. Pain in the strung thighs, red pain in the chafed buttocks, one against the other, in the chafed groin, in the gooseflesh skin of the thigh where a holster, or a knife in the trouser pocket, rubbed with the polish of dripping water. Pain in the creaking knees, in the seized-up calves, the straining ankle. And fierce pain between the toes, each impeding his neighbour; pain throughout the foot from the ball, the tired instep, up and around the heel where there was blood in the sock.

"All this pain was to be expected and accepted by a man who went marching over a long distance upon the

hill. His will was forewarned and immune from its assault, prepared for its attrition with a stored resolve. But sometimes in a march there came these moments, as sometimes in a battle there comes this crisis, when the will has slipped from the body and the mind become detached.

"The mind looked down and weakened the will by its analysis of pain and its identification with each component of the compound suffering. This mental vision of the pain led a flight of the spirit from revolt to apathy, from courage almost to surrender. Our mind looked down upon the darkened men who stumbled in unnatural silence, stumbled, tripped, stumbled, recovered from the grasping fall with pained labour, a laborious summons to tired members, to muscles and sinews, to the blinded senses. Our mind considered that the purpose of these muscles had vanished; that the purpose of the trumpet was not only preposterous but without reason and unworthy of response. The wind, increasing as we climbed until we touched and passed the crest, brought close upon us the falling darkness; brought too the quickening of each little, sullen hurt which banded with its neighbours into pain, thence split with an increasing strength into its many parts of separate pains, a pain to each member, a pain to each struggle, each part of every step, of every stumble and recovery.

"Over the crest and coming down in the thicker darkness over rougher ground, we leant forward, well forward as we had learnt and now disposed by instinct, pushing our weight above the toes as a man riding on his skis. But now the balance and the skill were gone, and no striving was of use to save the loss of feet slid forward from a man's backward falling. We fell in silence, without oaths or jests or whispered encouragements. We were aware of the darkness and of tiredness and of the danger to which the will was yielding. We

had lost our skill as we had lost our purpose; and our purpose became the more remote as our skill failed us.

"We men of the plains and valleys, men of the city streets and languid parks, of the mines and docks, the looms and furnace; we, the squires of midland acres, or stolid labourers of lowland farms, or guardsmen from the asphalt squares, costers and policemen from the London pavements: we, led to the mountains, shared one suffering and a common mind. In victory or defeat we are indivisible. This is called discipline; this, the instinct of man diverted to a military end."

THE NIGHTMARE OF THE TRUMPET

But I, Smith the Captain, though I share the common mind, retain an independent thought by the virtue of my appointment and the strength of my command. I, the local God, know the full suffering but have risen above it. That is the theory. With my brothers on the hill I am an outcast from our brothers in the plain. We are furious men on the mountain, not from the big and epic fates but from each mean contrivance of our common humility. I must understand how we, the voluntary slaves, display in proud anger and in angry contempt the tokens of our servitude, the scrubbed and polished shackles, the whitened bonds, the few tawdry coins, the volume of our law. When I speak, whatever I mean to say comes from my mouth with the voice of the trumpet; but my ears are tuned to the whimper of the flute. Though I speak with valour, the brazen valour that is not my own, I must hear the pathetic and trivial plea. I must listen to the violent tinkling of our little reward; for the littleness of our reward, which speaks to us with contempt from the plains, is the source of our anger; and my trumpet voice must penetrate the anger that fills us.

I must call to my men through their anger and see that their anger is not silent. I must call to a man by his name; "Hughes," I must call, and I must give him an order to renew the fervour of his own will. And when he has obeyed my order he may, he must, tell me of his sorrow, his anger and his grievance.

"I must call to a man by his name
And say to him 'Go,'
And slowly he went.
Or say to him 'Come'

And slowly he came
With a soldier's lament to show me his pay
Saying: 'Look—
A shilling or two as required by the book,
And I am tired.'

'There are some,' he said,
Who stayed in the valley below
(While others are gone to the test of the trumpet),
There are some who are paid by the work that
they do
And rest when the work is done."

But in reply, I, Smith, the Captain must be discipline and dignity, father and brother. I cannot avoid the trumpet which speaks through my voice; but the trumpet calls equally to me, to the Captain himself, and through me to the subordinate soldiers. "Captain," says the trumpet, "Get busy. Get busy on the mountain with all that a Captain has to do. Order your men, issue your orders, write your reports, your instructions, your returns; attend to your trays of questions and your baskets of explanation. A Captain can never be tired," says the trumpet. "Captain," the trumpet coldly reminds me,

"Captain! You had better
Remark this plan
Review this chart
Peruse this letter
And that minute write.

What matter that tonight
The heart of man seeks flight?

What matter
That the intimate toil continues,
The brain, the sinews protest
At their increasing use, unceasing pain,
This new request?
Why should you rest?"

And I, the Captain, agreeing through pride with the harsh voice of the trumpet, open my mouth to speak in friendship to the men. But though the men can sometimes discern the friendship of my thoughts and see the smile in my anger, they must hear only the voice of the trumpet forced from my lips, calling to the sergeant, ordering the corporal, stern and humourless and a little ridiculous: "Corporals!" says the second-hand voice of the trumpet, "Corporals! Fall-in your men,
Your whistles blow,
Your ranks inspect.
Expand your chests,
Your orders give.

Revive your hearts
For, see, the State must live
And you must show
An attitude correct, that when
Your spirits argue rest
You will support them then
With regimental zest."

And the corporals open their mouths to offer a man a glass of beer and twit him about a girl, but through their lips comes the false voice of the Captain borrowed from the trumpet. The corporals draw breath to say to the private; "Come on mate, that was a peach you had last night. Come on mate, you may stop a lucky one round the next corner." But out comes the same old voice of the trumpet in a less exalted key: "You!" say the corporals, "do up that collar and stop that talking."

"Privates," say the corporals, "stop that yammering and step lively You, Hughes," say the Corporals, "you may be a ruddy professor; and you, Harper," say the corporals, "you may be a blooming poet, but polish your buttons. And the lot of you," say the corporals, "stick out those chests and stop yammering."

"Hunt," say the corporals,
"Privates!" say the corporals,
With carriage bold
Step out upon the hill
Faster and bravely,
Your burden merry and your duty shown
With martial clarity.
For it is known
That gravely speaks the trumpet
of a nation's will.
It may well be
That in tranquillity
You, Woods, compute the stars,
While Brown divines the spaces;
That Barnes wrote verse or music,
published books;
Nevertheless, with military looks
You will adopt the regulation paces
And with humility fulfill
A corporal's will.

"Soldiers!" cries the trumpet, ignoring the proper military channels, "it is your glorious lot to suffer for this green and pleasant land." "Soldiers!" cries the trumpet, speaking most incorrectly direct to the great and the insignificant alike, "the future of this great country demands the sacrifice, the big sacrifice that is easy and the little sacrifice that is hard." "You" says the trumpet, "you have a great tradition behind you; the Scotsman to be dour, the cockney to be comic, the Welshman to sing songs. That is what wins battles. Step lively now! Look!" commands the trumpet, "at the picture of Mr. Churchill saying 'Deserve victory' from the side of a rock on the top of the mountain. We are all in this war, soldier and citizen alike. The soldier has the glory and the citizen the pay. It is windy on the mountain but the front line is in the plain. Step lively then, you soldiers, step lively, Step up, step up you soldiers all

Behold the poster on the wall
The roster and the drum's recall.
Sadness and separation,
Your stories sorrowful,
Cannot concern the nation
Whose verdant soul, whose stern tomorrow
Require your tear today.

Thus without fear obey
In honest cheer, historic quip,
Traditions of your station,
The cracking whip, the drummer's roll,
The trump that stole the national call.
Come! Step up all."

And the soldiers, waking up from a dream of despair to find themselves floundering on a mountain in a stream of abuse, unwittingly expand their chests, smarten their paces and look to the sergeant-major who has just

finished speaking. The sergeant-major himself is scarcely aware of the words that have escaped his lips. But the danger has passed, the threat of defeat vanished.

THE SERGEANT-MAJOR

For the sergeant-major, although a tall, upright, fine-figure of a man, whose words are more often my own than I, Smith, the captain, care to acknowledge, is nevertheless a citizen-soldier of discretion, a man of knowledge and a person who has lived deeply and with understanding. He strides at my side or follows behind me, a source of resolution, the spring of my will, and the voice that speaks the decision he has drawn from me. Although he is wise enough to be the sergeant-major of traditional pattern—the God and the stay that the men expect to find provided in any company—they can hear behind the rude orders, and see behind the martial eye, the compassion with which he drives them up the hill.

I, Smith, know the sergeant-major, the tall, dark man with blue eyes and the small moustache which he has grown to suit his duties; and though I cannot know the city apartment, the village, the farmhouse, the small manor, that he has left behind him in the plains, I am aware that his heart is tender and suffering behind the mail of his resolution. I know, too, that though he may speak fiercely to Hunt and put him in the book, revile Harper, and give extra fatigues to Robinson, nevertheless Robinson, Harper and Hunt are aware with me of the precise sympathy and the accurate knowledge which guides the sergeant-major in his acts of deliberate aggression. For we are all of one mind, I, the men and the sergeant-major; and just as he has told me the anger of Barnes and the sorrow of Hunt, I can speak of the deep

passions, deftly controlled, which flow in the sergeant-major's heart. As he calls now to the men to step up, as he weaves for them the nightmare that enfolds them with resolve, his inner mind remembers the plains, and his inner eye regards dispassionately the passions of his dead despair. Thus he recollects the morning on which he last stepped from his home and set his face towards the mountain, the parting that is never far from his inner remembrance.

EMBARKATION LEAVE

"It was better," he says, "that the parting that had to come, the farewell that had to be said, should be quick and decisive, a curt transition from day into darkness, with no long-drawn twilight of slow abandonment. The grey shadows and the faltering beat would have been inapposite; the slow dying of radiance and the halting song, beyond endurance. The dreary echoes of a cold farewell upon the doorstep; a taut journey in the hired car, side by side in wordless sorrow; the hopeless waiting on a wet platform with nothing left to be said and time, so precious, unwanted: these would have been the exquisite self-tortures contrived to heighten remembrance which was already abundantly clear. It was better not to glance back from the head of the stairs to the closed door of the bedroom, from the side of an army truck to the curtained first-floor window, from the road-tipped crest which overlooked the house for a last refreshment of regrets. One could not have borne a last retrospection: the end was too final to permit the luxury of added pain; the sense of repetition too keen for a part to be played in this ancient drama. One knew the blind sequence and inevitable laws which had always ordered these occasions; the

inescapable future, beyond knowledge, which had so often struck down the past. So many men with their changing implements of war had seen the Spring bud but not the Summer foliage, had looked on the blossom that would never fall and the bloom that never wilted. The play was an old revival, but one would not wave the hand and go with a gay smile and a gallant jest; honour was not enough beloved for such glamorous deception, or for this intimate withdrawal to be anything but dully tragic. The rift must be final and complete, without expectation of return or hope of renewal; for the worst must be over and done with in this ultimate hour, so that it could not again intrude on adventure and threaten resolve.

We filed up the wet gangway, step by step absorbed into the ship, with our head already vanished in the dark bowels, our centre still subject to the gale, and our hind-parts lingering on the station or—for all we knew—still sleeping in the train. Before us we looked upon a steel helmet, a pack surmounted by a blanket and super-imposed upon the tight roll of a waterproof sheet, a bowed back, a scrubbed belt and the flapping tails of a greatcoat. Behind us men trod upon our heels. We had been told not to talk, not to smoke, not to eat and to mind our rifles. It was hard to remember if one was officer, warrant officer or man, so absolute was our entombment in a submissive whole. The ruminant herd engaged a single mind; the flow of thought was fed by similar streams. We were indifferent to the immediate present; the common impulse forbade retrospection; and our future was a blank mystery of possible adventure and certain tedium. But we were all excited at a new enterprise. At our back a blank wall shut off everything that was not a part of a soldier's mental or material equipment. We were no longer sons or lovers, and the pain was more than forgotten: it had never been suffered.

It is clear that the force of a happening is in its relevance; not in the cut stone, nor in the setting, but in the finished jewel aptly disposed; not in the kernel, nor in the shell, but in the whole fruit, together with the tree which it has grown to burden and the garden that surrounds the tree. This, a blatant platitude, in wartime needs constant recollection; or a man may easily be misled into a false judgment of what is important, and an over-estimate of the momentous event which is, in fact, quite trivial. For nothing has a clear beginning and an obvious end for the man who is himself in the passage of events; and nothing is harder than to know how far back you must go to start a story, and when it may be concluded. For Experience, bred like a pearl from an irritation and its circumstance, must be long past before its worth or its limits may be recognised; and its vivid present—the suffering and the joy—are reflex spasms which may turn out to be quite negligible in what is to become a single, brilliant integer. Thus no man knows the poignance or banality of his farewells.

But the climax of an embarkation leave is always eventful, however bathetic its outcome. Such a parting is unforgettable, but soon forgotten until recalled long afterwards to its infant vigour. It is bitter and strong by what has gone before and by all that must follow. It has become constituent in a man, interfused with the spent passions of his earliest memories and keenest regrets. It will mark the end or the beginning of an epoch—it may be both—and its tokens are graven on a heart when the beat has halted. But within a day or so of the closing of the door, or of the last caress, it might never have happened.

Long afterwards, as told by events, and months afterwards in time, we waited at an inland station whither our men were returning from their various homes, and whence the unit was leaving for its port of embarkation.

The move had been accelerated with little warning; and into every home a telegram had come, to be held in anxious fingers, nervously twisted and surveyed, feared, suspect, and at last opened to reveal the curtailment by four days of the week's embarkation leave which had been granted. The exigencies of war had contrived their ravage with delicate cunning. This reduction of a bounty whose sum had long been totalled and apportioned by each individual recipient, was a neat refinement of what they had proved they could do to you. The prize, liberal enough (for many were sent overseas with only forty-eight hours' furlough), had been counted and spent in advance to the last hour; the passage of each day and evening, of every forgetful night and ominous awakening, had been foreseen and fitted, consciously or unconsciously, into a pattern that suited each man's pondered inclinations. This order in a yellow envelope was a wicked fracture of a calculated plan. A respite of a couple of days could hold all that was needful when its limitations were known from the start; but this smashing of the plate in half left only a useless fragment. Nor was the break clean and absolute; it was a crack that was clearly irreparable. For the telegram had not demanded instant recall but had given a man two days to return to his station. There had not been even the salve of a hasty, exciting departure; it was just that what had been the middle had suddenly become the dreary penultimate. Gone were the days whose future had become cushioned and protected from the imminent sorrow. But there was left the last of everything, the final repetition which could be so unbearably painful; the sleepless midnight of straining silence between lovers, the words that dared not come, tears that might not be seen, the talk that must be casual, the last dawn and rising, the last breakfast, and the ultimate hour.

At the station, one could see that these men had lately

relinquished a keen experience; that they were shaking themselves clear, had not yet fully sloughed, were unsure of their balance, as a person who has lately emerged from action and is subsiding from the shock of danger. They had again to find their places within the herd, to be redissolved into that corporate creature which tensed or relaxed at a word, which could be turned and twisted, moved and halted at will, which would soon be stowed into a train, carried northward, and released upon a quay to wind its stolid way once more into the innards of a transport. But as yet the characters had not resumed their parts: the comic was not being funny, nor the stoic precociously reserved. As in every community, there was a Nobby, a Ginger, a Bill and many other affectionate and relevant pseudonyms. A collection of men could become a company only as these traditional ingredients emerged, as the man with a song, the corporal with a jest, and the cook with abundant obscenity, fell into place to fill their obvious voids.

The unit that was reassembling at the station lacked many of these essentials. The soldiers were still individual oddments of humanity, heterogeneous, each peculiar in his own right. They were still congruous with civilian notions of tenderness, with the breath of passion and the taut caress. One could sense the tearful closing of the doors, a hurried parting from the cottage. One could easily envisage the disentanglement of a sergeant's gear from feminine articles, helmet recovered from a web of stockings, rifle extracted from a flimsy slip; but such conceptions would soon recover their normal incompatibility. At any time, the efficient non-commissioned officer, the sturdy man, the phlegmatic colonel, the accustomed superiors and subordinates, could be thought of in general terms as people with families and households and all their concordant surroundings; but they could not often be mentally joined to inventions of fierce

emotion or precise domesticity. Each, in the eyes of the other, was too lofty or too low, too weak or too strong, too comic or too magnificent. But now it was apparent that all men suffered in similar ways. My own pain, presented in many reflections, was found to be unoriginal.

Later, when we had packed into the train, and after we had started on the long journey, one could hear the revival of the communal creature. Jests became more frequent, were louder and heard from familiar voices. Trite obscenities grew in repetition from their accustomed source. Ginger started a song, Nobby resumed his soliloquies, and Bill was describing his companions in habitual terms. There was a fount of quick refreshment in this recovery. A man had regained his place, his duty, and the clear path of action and attitude. He couldn't go wrong if he followed his recollections and played the part in which he was practised. To the rhythm of the train and the well-known voices raised in the next carriage above the rattle of the journey, he could meditate with equanimity, at least with restrained emotion, on all the deeply personal events that had so recently happened.

But while a man was reconciled to the blood, the sweat and tears of battle, it was as well to remember that blood runs quickly, sweat has its recompense in fulfilment; but that the mental pain which asks for tears is infinitely more grievous than any physical suffering. A man could not easily forget the penultimate and the final: the bright and lovely security that had had to be so soon relinquished; the black foresight, the desolate wastes of future, the soft, warm, comfort that scarcely remained. He could never forget the last cup of lovely assuagement, the soft cheek with the salt tear, the lips half opened in unuttered plea. He could not forget the mutual suffering, the pain that he left behind to match the pain that he took with him. He could not forget the

going, nor the penultimate knowledge that the going must come. "I cannot forget," a man says, "I cannot hope. It is now apparent that this, without hope of reprieve, is the hour of sorrow.

It is now apparent, now sure
That this incident is closing,
That the immaculate spell of the present
Is losing to the persistent future,
Must conceive Farewell.

It is the rule of war
That our meeting be framed by its ending,
The incident named by its limitation with
the correlation
Of sentiments blending:
Joy and despair.

That was the last night, that the last waking,
These the last hours that belong to you.
Hide, my beloved, from the overtaking
Instant of our separation.
Look away, beloved, from my sly preparation:
From my helmet and gas mask parked at the
side of the passage;
From the disarray
Of kit and equipment piled together;
From this display
Of my polished buttons and my shining
leather.
Beloved hide
Till I am gone from you.

We could never defy nor escape this morrow,
And in the last stillness together
The woven ecstasy
Was broken by unshed sorrow

Riven by unheard cry:
"Are we for ever
To meet and to sever,
To greet and to say goodbye?"

Not gone!
Must we weep
On the echo that waits in the pain of
memoried sleep?
Must we linger again
In the bruised remembrance of happiness
lost,
In the long bitterness of peace that is past,
In the frozen despair of our separateness
Apart and alone?

Often I came but to leave
And each time
The accident of love was bright
Until, calling without reprieve,
Beckoned in sullen mime
Beyond the gate opening before me,
The spacious vistas desolate,
Shadowed without light,
Calloused in misery,
Homogenous in agony,
The grey of stillborn day
Whose hopeless glooms foretell
Only Farewell.

There is this last moment
That my senses wish
To have and to cherish.
To greedily stress
Each fragment of your loveliness.
This sensual instant
No absence can dispel;

So, at our death,
Let me finger your breast,
Let me see with your eyes,
Taste your lips, breathe your sighs,
Drink your breath.
Let me remember them well,
Too well.

Thus with an end to bereaving
The last rites sung,
The mourning rung,
The cup drained, the repast concluded
No more deluded
With penultimate promise
Of a last remembrance in a last caress,
Hasten my leaving!

No hours are left to tell
before we part
And beats our cloven heart
In its last pulse: farewell."



"Give me a hand, sergeant," said the medical orderly.

"Jesus," said the sergeant, "put him out, can't you, and let's get going."



A STAR FELL

"THE spacious vistas desolate," the sergeant-major repeated to himself; "shadowed without light, calloused, homogenous in agony. . . ." And then, speaking aloud to me, he warned me that we were a

trifle off our course. The luminous glow of his compass was now quite clear in the grown darkness.

We had topped the ridge and were stumbling downwards in the night, tired men tripping and slipping on the steep and difficult descent. But, now that the voice of the trumpet had again spoken through my lips, through the lips of the sergeant-major and the corporals into a common ear, one felt assured that the dangerous moment had been passed, and that while fatigue was no less predominant, and pain no less keen than before, the hour, the mountain and the darkness had lost their mastery and were reduced to simple and familiar elements which could be conquered by a sturdy spirit. The perilous detachment of the mind, which had allowed the will to release its control of the body, had given place to the ordinary rhythm of a painful toil. Men had regained their human eminence. For one moment, even, there was a sudden sense of glory in combat with a great gust of wind which swept its rage not only across the hill, but through the whole sensible universe, shaking land and sky, tearing apart the clouds, rending a gap in the great masses which tumbled above our heads, almost about our shoulders. Braced against the shudder of this wind, we had conquered elements and were fired with human strength. We raised our heads to the sky seen through this rent in the clouds, to the fragment of a vision held in that settlement of stars. One more gust thrust a blade into the cloud bank, ripping at the hole that had been started and slitting the mauled canvas with a long, jagged breach drawn down, right down to the distant ridge beyond the imminent descent. Then, in the silent wake of the wind, unnatural interval of silence, a star fell. This point of light, the fall of a star, piercing the rim of our visible world, cut its arc through the sky as the wind had sliced the cloud before it. And for one moment the heart

had been pierced anew, again cloven. A breath was caught, a sigh started and stifled; the grey ashes of an inward vision glowed once more as a beacon on a far peak. And all because a star fell in indescribable beauty; because a star fell
from star-strewn eminence
into the tomb of day
whence visions come
and apparitions stray
to do their penitence.

Thus like the call of a scimitar
was the fall of a star;
And this quick cut,
the part of a keen blade
displayed in such impetuous
descent,
rent new incisions in a wounded
heart.

Athwart our head
a star fell
a star was dead.

In this bright death
we sought and held a sigh
suppressed a cry
half-caught a breath

A star fell
and the night was that much
darkened
but the heart that much harkened
to a tale re-told.

An old, old pain, renewed.
pursued us
past the pale of dreams
until it seems
that, as the star fell,
a soldier said again
"Farewell!"

Then, as the star died and fell into the darkest mass that must represent the next crest that we were to conquer, we stumbled upon a wall, a heap of stones, a thick and widespread cluster of nettles, a dump of ancient rubbish which, as a matter of fact, we should have been expecting to encounter; for it was shown on the map as a farmhouse and was supposedly in ruins, for it was many, many miles from any road or track and cannot have been inhabited within the memory of long generations; for it hung between sky and valley in a windy intolerable detachment that should have denied human penetration; for its very existence was illogical, a grim twist of a fairy tale, an antique legend.

"We'll halt here," said Smith.

THE SETTLEMENT

THEN in due order and under the direction of the sergeant-major, camp was prepared: pickets were posted on the immediate heights and a guard mounted; the relative virtues of each possible site were assessed—a fragment of roof allotted to this section, the sturdy angle of a wall for another; and the company, splitting its corporate bonds, became a settlement of small communities, of a dozen centres of parochial government, each subordinate headquarters, each platoon, each section making

for itself a private harbour from the elements and a refuge from the wider and insistent authority. This withdrawn, this decentralization of self-government, was all of a soldier's privacy: a retreat into the warm security of his personal friends and allotted comrades; the recognition by his immediate comrades of his personal desires and peculiar needs; the compromise construction of all the individual desires of all the soldiers into a mean, the most commonly acceptable structure of a miniature society, a small communal life that moved and breathed in its own composite pattern to its own characteristic rhythm. Of all the twinkling planets that clustered among the ruins, each had its own particular blink and glow; this little settlement sang; another grumbled; a third depended upon an anarchistic scheme of government; and others specialised in their kitchen, in the ingenuity of their shelter contrived from salvage, in a flameless fire, or in a system of apportioned chores; but the rules of each were based on the strange assumption that its individual members were somehow sociable, good, even unselfish, un-ambitious, ungreedy, un-acquisitive, un-competitive, feeling a curious urge to perform with will a reasonable share in the production of common amenities and the creation of mutual content. "You can't run a state that way," any legislator would have told you. But the natural law of ostracism, or of a heavy boot against an anti-social rib, provided smooth and faithful justice.

But although each small community had its own distinctive methods and had evolved a temporary life of its own peculiar design, all men settled to their rest in a prescribed routine which had been evolved from long experience, the most apt to meet the common exigencies of a tired man. Each action that a soldier made, cautious and deliberate in fatigue, was paid for with miserly discretion, costly in this hour of exhaustion at

a price not lightly to be squandered, but to be disbursed only for a return of fuller rest, or of greater facility when the time must come with morning twilight to resume the labour of travel. Thus, equipment was laid open behind each man so that it could be quickly slipped over the shoulders; a weapon was freshly smeared with oil to prevent the rust that would steal a later rest; socks were changed, powder dusted between the toes, a gall dressed, a thread of darning wool drawn through a pricked blister and left to drain away the fluid. But at length, with feet propped above the level of their bodies to ease the blood from these concentrations of pain, men settled to their food and to the first chapters of their rest.

Then, in each corner of the ruined farmstead, the talk, the snatch of song began: first the ribald gibe and automatic oath, later the jest and riposte, and finally the steady beat and breathing of a quiet communion. One could with certainty foretell the nightly programme, each familiar voice that would lift in turn to speak an accustomed part, the grumble, the taunt, the obscenity, the sympathetic cheer, the wise, the ribald, the profound comment, and the words of local justice lifted in rebuke or retribution. The heart was warmed, and the soul revived from its frozen marches of fatigue by this recurring springtime, this stirring of life as the foliage opened and the blossom unfolded from the sap of a man's spirit. The familiar landmarks of the season, one by one, were met in the darkness: that old, old jest and this perpetual story; the voices of old friends, old songs and memorable conquests; tokens of old and strange friendships grown in the night and strayed from this or that corner of the encampment, from the relic of a cowshed, the remnant of a sty, the tumbled cottage, the ancient ash that wept over a fallen gateway.

BARNES, THE COMMUNIST CORPORAL

OVER in this corner may be found the kingdom of Corporal Barnes. Here his nomadic section has prepared their rest, and hence his flow of words is poured into the common night. His voice is never silent, loud and explosive in command or complaint, level and subdued in his constant dissertations and twisted argument. It is a curious section; for Barnes, the communist corporal, is an autocratic commander under whose inquisitive rule a man is apt unpredictably to shrivel, or else to bloom in irrational profusion. The weak, the puny become bright and strong; the strong and the rank may well be cut down to poor mediocrity; and the mediocre alone can expect to remain in their common and average state. Nevertheless, for all his jugglery with men, his is the most efficient, the most reliable and the most prosperous section of them all. Its nightly camp is usually the most sheltered and ingenious; its toil the most intense and least wearisome; its welfare the most studiously contrived. For these reasons, one supposes, it has become the most popular section to which any soldier is glad to be posted. "He looks after you," is the common tribute; although his solicitude is not the sort of adventure which one would expect an independent man to welcome. But for the child-like Hunt, the timorous rodent with a brave but shivering soul, Barnes is the refuge and support. For while Barnes is adolescent in his eternal yearning and dissatisfaction, illusion and dispute, for ever held at arm's length from the adult state, poor Hunt is the infant at both ends of a life's story. He is the whimpering child, frightened that he may be reassured, credulous but untruthful, creature of simple but incalculable, uncalculated motives, adventurous and timid, living in dreams but unaware of visions;

and he is the old, old man in the childhood of senility, in the mental petulance and sentimentality of the pink-rimmed eye and obstinate fear, in the knowledge of death, the assurance and fear of death, and the longing for perpetuity. Hunt depends on Corporal Barnes in the mistrustful way that the old depend upon the young, and in the worshipful emulative way that the young depend upon the adolescent. And Barnes, accepting dependency from all his men, asks no more from them than that. And the children of his broody care follow the cluck and call of his security. This is his power of leadership, a curious phenomenon in a renegade gentleman who has discarded the supposition that he was born to lead; and a curious phenomenon in an unsound man upon whom it is clearly unwise to be dependent, who carries too many burdens for mortal strength, burdens of others, the anxious fear and the cruel letter, burdens of his own, his culture and education and the ideals of youth which most men find too heavy to be humped into manhood.

There is no doubt that the spoken word is more to Barnes than the convenient currency of thought. It is the sole medium of expression remaining to a spirit which demands expression for its momentary fulfilment, its fragment of internal peace. Now that writing is denied to him, speech has become, for Barnes, the note of music, the sweep of a brush and the careful growth of colour, the cut of a chisel and the flow of rhythm and form. Words, in his perception, have acquired their own colour, form, rhythm, pitch, weight, and meaning within meaning by association, implication and degree of relevance. Words are everything; and to silence him would be worse than to cage the lark or prison the antelope; it would be to blind the painter or cut off the hands of the pianist. For Barnes will talk for every purpose, for relief and escape, for fortitude, or for the

mental recreation of argument. And he will talk abundantly on every subject, treating each with copious immodesty, wildly but often plausibly, with a personal reference to his own circumstance or passion.

"Money," he would say, for instance, "lots of money, is essential to life. You have to have great hoards of wealth, your car and chauffeur, chambers in Albany, a stable-full of horses at Melton, a grouse moor in Inverness, a forest, a river, a yacht, a villa at Cannes. You have to *own* life and you can't *live* without it. That is why we don't live . . . I've half-lived with my manservant, my chambers, fine wine, horses, the company I chose. I had the opportunity that my father and my grandfather and his grandfather stole from my fellow men. . . ." And then he might break off and put on the standard tirade that started with the equality of man and ended with the capitalist and wage-slave.

And his thoughts wind curious ways following the passions of much that he has loved without understanding: music, for instance, but only the simplest, superficial drama of music in the surge and ebb of an orchestra, or the half-seen pattern in the blend and purpose of each instrument, whose notes struggle to the ear of a passionate but ignorant listener. For he doesn't listen to an orchestra for the sake of what it is playing but for the simple passions that the whole aural and visual scene may evoke, the soaring flights of thought, the abortive tear, upborne on the wave of a crescendo passage. "I might be the flute," he says, as his stature dwindles in the surf of violins; "like the flute, given a few distinctive bars for the whimper of a thoughtful prayer, a pitiful cry. Or I might be, like most of us, one of those second violins or violas, fiddling away for life with perpetual resolve, but unheard by the untrained ear for most of the long symphony. . . . I may not be the first violin with the burden of the song; or the osten-

tatious trumpet and obtrusive drum perched high with their fancy parts and privilege. I am the flute," he says (and the men listen idly, half-listen half-intrigued, half-started to snigger, half-understanding what he himself has not yet understood). "I am the flute, an instrument which often you can't hear. . . ." (like hell, says Owen) "an instrument let loose on occasions for a frightened pipe or a saint's whisper, but whistling away all the time in a sort of servile role, in a voice that is mute to the untrained ear, that's me, the flute . . ."

I am the flute:
Child woken fearful,
Sigh subdued within the growing wave
Of urgent outcry,
Sigh half-broken into timid prayer
And pitiful complaint.
The saint within the wilderness
So nearly mute
Is I, the flute.

I am the muted strings,
Sad slave who sings a formal mourning
For the death of the brave trumpet.
I am the sleeping strings
Whose breath is the breathing
Of the whole harmonious wave
Of this confusing song.

Long, long I waited
While the melody debated with the kings,
The trumpet and the treble strings
Who own the common throng.

The trumpet from his throne
And autocratic drum
(That highland princeling)
Sing their uncontained delight
Or discontent.

While I, the slave
Restrained to automatic sigh,
Obedient cry—the flute—
The servile, grave accompaniment
Of each melodious break,
Must make
A nearly mute lament.

And having likened himself to a flute or a second violin, just for the sake of talking, of expressing something that surges and leaps to demand release, he may be silent for a brief moment while somebody else is incited to pick up the tale in a more reasonable key. "Last time I heard a band," says Robinson, "was in Hyde Park with a bit of a girl I'd picked up the Sunday before listening to a man at Marble Arch about faith healing."

"Last time I heard a band," says Brown, "was the Salvation Army on a wet Sunday in Bradford. . . ."

"Last time I heard a band," says Hunt, "was a lovely sunny evening at Bognor. . . ."

"With a peach," says Owen, "with yellow hair and big brown eyes that show where the yellow comes from. . . ."

"No," says Hunt, "all by myself on a quiet evening, with the last of a sunset in a calm sea. . . ."

"I've no use for a calm, insipid sort of sea," Barnes interrupts, searching for something that has just crept out of an ancient record. "You want the sea when it's wild and rough with fine, big waves. . . ."

"That's right, corp," says Hunt, "it's better to bathe in: it's all right bathing in a rough sea if you're a strong swimmer. . . ."

"Waves aren't meant to be bathed in," says Barnes severely; "they're to be looked at and thought about, a subject for contemplation. Waves put a man in his place; for the life of a wave is the life of a man, a

common man or a great man; and the passage of waves is the life of humanity. The common, the great, the ordinary and the genius, each follows proudly but submissively, obedient to the great rhythm. Each keeps his place in a procession that brings him in the end to his death on the beach at Bognor."

"Genius!" said Owen with instinctive scorn evoked by the suggestion of human inequality and by suspicion that the corporal was pretending profundity with a trite message. "You don't get a genius nowadays. This is a democracy."

"I'd like to meet a genius," said Hunt simply; "I suppose Mr. Churchill's a genius?"

"Mr. Churchill's a common man like you and me and Mr. Bevin," said Robinson.

"Who's a common man?" said Owen.

"A genius," said Barnes; "so absolutely common, with all the common powers of perception and expression so keen that his ears and his voice know only the words of all humanity. A common man, a curious man, who has never found gold when others sought it, who has never forgotten the garden which others fled. . . ."

THE CURIOUS MAN

"GARDENS and gold?" said Hunt perplexedly.

"Man was born in a garden," said Barnes.

"Man was born in sin," said Owen.

"No," the corporal answered, "man was born in the image of God in God's garden. You, Owen, who were reared to believe in the word of God, should listen to the word of God in preference to the word of the preacher. It is all written:

In the beginning
Molten spaces, burnt in flameless fires,
Hid, hid
In tenuous stretch of nameless faces
The grimaces of remote desires.

Then God stretched forth his hand
And bid the wreathing voids divide
And set aside wide æons of a swollen land
Pregnant with human heart
Wherein he chose a part and laid
A lovely pleasaunce that began
This world for man.

This curious man
Whom God then chose
As warden of terrestial sward
Where flows in idle span
A garden of the Lord:
This man was therefore made,
(In a dispassionate hour
That on the lake of sunset lingers still),
With broad hands fitted to a spade
And sturdy fingers tender to a flower
To till the brave abundance of the vale
With measured zeal.

This concept of celestrial bliss displaced
And lent to earth for measured toil
Was incomplete.
Though sweet the sunbeam spent and fell,
Though sweet as well the petals shone
And faced the treasured soil with simple
smile,
Though sweet the wayward stream
Was swept to man in wide relief,

The gardener wept
And wept to be alone.
His purpose gone,
In grief he lonely cried to God
Who, while His gardener slept,
Extracted from his side
The human bride.

Then hand in hand enraptured went
In sunny places fleet to tread
The bridegroom and the bride;
Astride a pleasant land they fled
And all their starlit passions spent
In nuptial imprisonment
Upon a captured tide.

Thus brightly shod in lordly dew
They walked the fragrant field
Or lightly trod the hallowed plain
Or climbed the torrid hill
To find the will of God
Concealed anew in rhymed refrain
Of fallen rivulet and windy chord,
A word within a world content
Lent by the Lord.

In happiness they haply stayed
Wherever prospect served,
And laid themselves to rest
Upon the apex of a world whose spun
desires
Were played to lyres of noonday sun.
And as they tired,
The melody and rhyme of static time
Were woven one
Within the texture of a passing day.

"Stay, stay!" they made
Importunate behest;
"Stay, stay," they cried,
Their fires lit,
And quit the world.

When they were gone
To distant cloudbanks
And the harmonies of pause and poise
And all-concordant passion,
The world awaited their desires,
The tide waited
And the breeze abated
To a tranquil breath so still
To ride the ease of death until,
Their passion done,
The world again passed on.

"That's a blasphemy," said Owen angrily, "that's distortion of the word of God who created man that was born in sin. . . ."

"But still the parson cried (said Barnes)
The God in man has died of natural sin."

"Sin is no less sin," Owen answered, "for the way you clothe it. Where is the sin in your story?"

"The sin of the apple?" Barnes asked. "The apple was no fruit but a nugget of gold. Why did God make the apple if its flesh was sinful? But why did God make the nugget of gold when every sin lives in its lustre? The maggot of greed, the lust for power over men, the loss of power over a man's self, the fraudulent measure of fame, the warmth of a crowd's approval, the fawn and sneer, the filthy, filthy maggots that crawl in the gold that man upturned one day as he dug in the Lord's

garden. He turned his sod, and there in the umber earth, the rich, loving earth, lay blinking the horrid nugget that his hand stretched out to seize, to grasp in greed. Then man forgot the man

Who held his bride to face the fallen sun
At lonely nightfall,

Who showed his bride the lace of foliage
Stretched on smiles of wanton stars,

Who led his bride,
Her eyes awash with morning mists,
To see the sunrise.

"Then man forgot," Barnes said, "all that God had made him; and man became what we now know as man: a creature of such greed and ugliness that the parsons, seeking some explanation for the disfigurement of God's image, abuse apparent in the jolly squire and in the parson himself, propounded Owen's theory of original sin. For the parson dared not see the evils of the gold which he begged from his flock every Sunday morning or the gold which came from the squire's pocket. And the parson dared not see the maggots that lived in his gold. nor the fall of man that had happened when the spade of the gardener struck the yellow metal in the umber soil. For that was the end of God in man. That was the end of the garden," said Barnes. "That was the end of beauty and of God's image. That was the bitter end of a beautiful dream that God dreamt and man can still remember incredulously.

For still this curious man
Can sometimes hear the melody
Divinely chanted,
Can sometimes see the holy river
Slanted from loving eyes,

The weeping eyes of angels,
Sleeping eyes of a child
Held to a generous breast;
Or the bright rest of evening
Pressed from fallen skies,
Such sighs, such ecstasies as yet
Are still let fall
From the tall stoop of sunset;
Or the woken call, the tears,
The cries of passion torn
Torn from sunrise."

Owen swore obscenely. The black foothills of his native mountain grew only hypocrisy; and he saw hypocrisy, smelt and heard it, in the gush of uncensored sentiment that the corporal unashamedly let fall. For Owen came of a race whose many generations had hewn the earth for gain but had seldom tilled it for the golden ears or the humble potato.

The voice of Barnes continues its perpetual explorations, but the remainder of the Section are, one by one, retreating into silence, still listening, it seems, for now and again Robinson or Murphy will proffer a confirmation or Owen splutter an indignant contradiction, ejaculations dragged from the verge of sleep as a dying fire stabs a last spurt of flame from dull embers. Certain of the men, one knows from experience, have already withdrawn to dreams or the harbours of dreamless sleep; and others are following their own personal rites, recalling memories from a high glimpse of cloud-enfolded stars, reading a few pages of a book or even, like Hunt, writing a few lines of a letter or a diary.

ONE knows, for instance, that Hunt will by now be drawn to one side away from the others, secure in some queer shelter of his own design, engaged with a short length of pencil and a child's exercise book, writing, desperately searching for the word, the phrase that will record for him a fragment of what has been said tonight, a thought, an argument, a passion that met him with the wind as he crossed a shoulder of the mountain. And when Hunt writes, he is transformed; his mind is transformed so that words come which his ears would not own to have heard, nor his lips to have spoken, nor his brain to have understood. To write, even to scribble in the child's exercise book, is to escape, to see through wider-opened eyes, to hear new music, to expand, to breathe, to live. He must write, just as Barnes must talk; and while Barnes maintains the flow of words, talking propounding preposterous views, inciting argument, straining to record, to leave in some second mind, and in the minds of all who are not too tired and drained of argument to respond, the hopes and fears and bitter indictments whose urge provokes him, whose source wells from the wildest ridge that we had crossed and whose torrent cascades through this curious mind; while Barnes must thus respond with his incessant speech, Hunt must squirm and struggle with the written word, the fugitive expression, the relief.

For Hunt and Barnes—each of them in his different way—feel always the unadmitted fear, if not the presence itself, of imminent extinction; they are aware of the vast squeezing of the mountain which forces, hammers, beats a man with the iron of a furtive warning until he is pressed into the fierce, white-hot core of mind and passion fused to a single point of bitter flame. This is

the flame of creation. "I must record," Barnes would say if he knew the reason for his urgent speech and sour argument. "I must record," Hunt cries as he grinds the words from an unwilling brain, as he pens the letters that are never to be sent, as he hides the stumbled phrase within the pages of his grubby book. "I must record," the tired hearts cry, in the hour of urgent weariness, when extinction, meaning rest is at last desirable. "But if I am to go," they cry, "I must leave some rivulet of light, some darker pool of thought, to mark the suffering and the plea that were mine on the mountain. In some way," they cry, "I must record

The wildest hour that I have suffered:
The tower of longing and the spire
Of intricate desire;

I must record
The brazen sunset,
And the memories of a plain
Where wind curled willows,
Tore a rose;
The wildest moments
When a passion and a pain
Displaced repose:
These must remain.

'There goes,' I cried,
'A bitter flame
That came to sear and die.
Dear star, it must remain
Within the human garden;
It must lie
Within the tumbled rose,
This heart of fire
This pool of rest.

For this bequest of war,
Wild star which fell to nothing,
Must remain.

And on the mountain shoulder
Came a thought too keen
Too dearly bought, too dearly seen,
A phrase so nearly heard,
An argument, a word
I must record."

We must record, you see, in one way or another; for each man feels, I feel, we all feel, that the hour is brief and our moment may not linger. One cannot tell; but anyway we shall be gone from the garden that we have built in quick joy and a little sorrow. We may be gone as rotting corpses, or as live corpses with a soul fled; for whatever happens, it cannot be Hunt, Barnes and I who are left to return to the plain. Our fathers stepped lightly on to the hill and came back tired, old, indifferent, different from our fathers. So we, in our turn, cannot return. It may be the kernel without the husk, or the husk without the kernel; but it cannot be us, completely, as we were when we talked in the pleasant shadows of our own valley. For if we live as bodies, our souls will be tired, our hopes blown, our pleas no longer insistent. We can only believe that the hopes of our son will blossom, the soul aflame, the voice adamant. We, as we know ourselves, will be dead of giving without return and lending without recovery. But something that we have suffered may be beautiful, may linger. And this we must record, so that a last bequest may be left to a son who walks in his own garden and will feel that the dead are tiresome. It may be a last entreaty. "There is something to be said for the dead?" we ask our sons a little pathetically, full of the sin of self-pity. "The dead

have their uses?" we suggest to our sons in their Spring afternoon. "There is something left of us: a shower of April rain, perhaps, a fall of May sunlight, a butterfly settling on a blossom, a hidden pool in the shrubbery, a pool of shade for fallen petals. My son!" we plead, "My son

There is this to be said
For the dead, the dying,
The soon-to-be dead,
When today is done
In your spring afternoon:

There is our tomorrow,
The unshed sorrow,
The rain of an unshed tear
That remain to water the garden;

The pool of an unflown year
Unknown will linger a while;

The dew of a dawning smile
In a clear morning
Rests on the garden;
And the sorrowful shower
Of our last mistake,
The mistake of death,
Gives breath to the flower
Of your intimate prayer.

There and there
Where the buds break
And the blossoms tremble,
Assemble the fluttering fires,
The peacock hope
And the common plea
That remain of me."

It is this future garden which Barnes tends with his loud argument and Hunt considers in his brief seclusion. Here, in this angle of a ruined wall, Hunt has slung his waterproof sheet for roof, has piled his pack and equipment for prop and pillow, has drawn his great-coat upon his shoulders, lit his shelter with a candle housed in a salvaged tin, and sits, huddled and cold, but occupied with the pencil and exercise book which represent for him the seeds of perpetuity.

"Here you, Hunt! Have you changed your blasted socks?" Corporal Barnes asks him looking at his blued and peat-sodden boots.

"No, corporal, no," he says, without much thought but relieved that it is Barnes and not the sergeant-major who has noticed his negligence. "No time," he says, "but I'll change them directly."

"Get cracking then," says Barnes. "You've got to look after your feet," he says unconvincingly, for even Barnes suspects that Hunt's feet, and the pain they will cause him whether he tends them or not, are trivial affairs in a closing panorama. Hunt's feet, one feels, will outlast his body which is frail enough; and Hunt, one knows, is moved by the grandiose hope that the pages of his copy book will outlast even his feet, will hatch into someone's memory.

"I must write to my son," he explains, but obediently begins to unlace his boots. Barnes has to stay to watch him, as otherwise the chore will be left uncompleted in favour of the more pressing task, the filling of this book, the composition of these letters which are to be left for a son to read when the mountain is again untenanted.

Hunt has never been known to post, or even to write what is usually known as a letter; for all his writing must go into this exercise book which is the record of his instant sentiment. "No time for letters," he says; and this, one feels, is true. There is time to suffer and sometimes

to rejoice; there may be time for the quick record of a fleeting hope, a pressing fear; but where is the leisure and repose necessary for a letter? It takes two to make a letter, and both must be present in some degree or other at the time of writing. But the woman we have left in the valley, the child who is wandering in the garden and trampling on the borders, are not beside us on the mountain. Sometimes we scribble a line, of course: another pair of socks, cigarettes are scarce and chocolate hard to come by. But the careful remembrance of the one who is to read, the painting of the picture for one who is to search for symbols: this needs the languor of an idle afternoon, the sun the warmth, some sense of security.

IN CALIFORNIA

"In California now," Barnes says (though the others don't quite know what he is driving at, have to have his target explained to them), "in California there is the sun, the shelter, the surf, the ease, the security to turn a lovely phrase and ripen a plump sonnet. Some folk have gone to California for this reason; not because they fear the mountain, but because the mountain seemed a senseless place to sow with manhood. If there is passion in California, the passion of a wounded world fighting for its blood stream and its breath, good, honest, passionate fertility in a death struggle, then those who have fled there have gone wisely. But if there is no more than sunny aridity, with a wet patch or two of tropical abortion, then they might as well have sown a native hillside passionate and cold, as dug themselves into a foreign plain, dung for a foreign orchid."

And Barnes speaks for most of us, although in language which we don't command, and with allusions

which we can't follow. For we are apt to feel on the mountain that an orchid is anachronistic, is dead for always; that we shall never again be keen on an orchid. But then those who climb mountains, and who stay there, or return to the plains with only the half of their souls, discard logic and jettison judgment: these are just something extra to carry, not laid down in the regulations. Instead of a well-balanced passion, all we can offer is a tarnished sentiment blown through a cracked trumpet, a somewhat lighter burden. Sound judgment, the critical faculty, the cult of restraint, of cynical art and precise expression, the wealth of erudition and buried knowledge—these need the shelter of a plain, must flourish in California.

"And in California," Barnes says (and Hunt repeats in his exercise book), "we might be poets, musicians, artists, whereas on the hill we are somewhat soiled soldiers, unproductive and unheeded, pursuing an unknown task whose fulfilment—for all we know—may be of no worth, may be a liability to the grand total of human effort. In California, we could write to the women who wait for the letters that do not come, were never posted, were not even written,

"In California
I could sit in the sun
Where kind sands run with the grasping
tide,
And there
I could plot you a verse, compose you a
story
Concerning the glory, revealing the pride
Of my lingering youth.

In some back hovel
I can scribble a letter
With little to tell

Except (my sweet) that I need you
And that here they feed you quite well,
And it would be better
If the next khaki socks were double-knit
over the heel.

In California
The sun-laden poet
May be right, may be wrong,
But lovely his song
To quote to the soft-plucking wave;

But from my billet is sent
The lonely lament of the soldier not asked
to be brave,
Not asked to be bold or resourceful or
glorious,
But furious
At the lack of a head in the bend of his arm
And the smell of cooking vegetables."

LETTERS TO MY SON

And this perverse complaint, this plaintive explanation and querulous excuse is all that we can offer to those who ask for letters. We cannot mirror ourselves for the recipients; we cannot flow into poetry or paint the landscape. Hunt and I and all of us have lost the means to conjure the presence of the person who may wait for what we are writing. We can write only for ourselves or, more selfishly still, for what we hopefully believe may be our last chance of immortality. That, of course, is a secret hope, forlorn at that, and going no further than a sort of belief that a son may show an unreasonable curiosity in the mental transitions of his sire. For we feel things still; and the best we can do is crudely to

record our feelings, really—we suppose if we are honest—for the sake of our own evacuation. There can be no more to it than that: our feelings need, for our own relief, some flight of freedom, some brief escape from imprisonment, some tawdry form of expression, a verbal eruption or a scribbled line, a phrase evoked with pain, a word chosen in labour. So we write for ourselves, and for our sons whom we feel to be ourselves by the chance of their conception. We cannot compel them to read, but we can leave them the chance to study what a sorry thing they sprang from, what a sorry muckheap of the world was built up by their sires. We can leave them this warning.

This is a record which should be written for a son: a note of admonition, the picture of a culprit in his own pillory, a fragment of personal history, a comment of genealogy. This is what Hunt feels, although in a dumb but urgent sort of way, as he sits huddled beneath his waterproof sheet, filling his exercise book with what may well be no more than the excrescence of fatigue and frustration. "These are the letters," he says to his son, "letters which record my poor sentiments, picked up God knows where, my barren hopes dead before fruition, my torn imaginings scattered in the wind before their petals were fully opened, the oddments of salvage gathered on my route, the common flower and the flowering weed which I found in a crevasse of the mountain. These are the letters which you may read scornfully in your manhood, or burn to heat the water of your bath, or leave to gather mould in some unheeded attic. These are all that I shall leave you.

For these, the letters which were never sent,
Are made of salvaged hours, a fallen star,
An outcast passion or a sentiment
Left by the gross exigencies of war.

Thus: find a tendril rooted from the path
With acid herb from ravaged pastures bled
And, underfoot, the aftermath
Trod by a battle limping home to bed.

Such rusting rubbish as a man collects
From midnight watch, from marches over mountains,
The refuse and the derelicts:
These are the sum of military bounties.

So you, my son, may read in peace disposed
The curiosities a war enclosed."

Thus, or in similar words, Hunt has started his exercise book whose precise contents are, of course, known to no one but himself. Page by page, almost line by line, the commentary has grown with the passage of time and travel, with the crests topped, the slopes climbed and descended. Fatigue and physical endeavour, loneliness in the midst of companions, frustration, labour to no apparent end, nostalgia, boredom and humiliation: these chase the mind of man in curious flights of recollection and argument to seek strange harbours. It is here, in such refuge, that the soldier's private and unassailable mind—that mind whose emanations are preserved for himself, and for his children, born or yet to be begotten—seeks for the fragment of memory and current experience, turns it, twirls it in a stray fall of sunshine, notes the underside and the play of light and colour, until some quick expression of desire tumbles into a sequence of words that has to be spoken aloud or recorded in writing. Mind and heart are so locked together, the one confusing the other, that there is no distinction to be made between a statement of thought and a sigh of passion. The sober argument is mazed with sentiment, and the sentiment impurely washed with illogical reason. The pasture is rank with weeds,

but a man must mow as though his life depended on the crop. And although the stack which each man raises from the cutting of his own peculiar meadow is similar to the next (for they are both soldiers), no man can really deduce the texture of another's gathering. No man can put the passions of his friend into the words that the sentient heart dictates. And no man can explicitly describe the writings in Hunt's exercise book. But all are aware of the contents, of the limits, the depths and the tenor of his word and phrase, but not of the setting in which each thought performs its part, or of the action of each tragic passion and strutting sentiment.

I know, for instance, the nostalgic gratitude peculiar to a soldier; the thankfulness for what had once been given, before it was taken away; the bright gift that was only a loan; the delight that made the parting most bitter. There is praise in a soldier's heart for the good things that have remained as memories; and though one cannot suggest the vehicle on which this theme has ridden into Hunt's pages, one can be certain that he has recorded in some form or other the assuagement, the self-instruction so often repeated, to remember the sweet behind the sour, the heat of the fire before the embers turned too soon to dust. "Remember," each soldier bids himself, whenever self-pity obtrudes, "remember that we had our day, that we were opened to the sun and could have winged the morning air." And a voiceless cry goes back to the partner of this recurrent parting: "Remember, beloved, that a star once shone in twilight; and remember that before our petals fell

We flowered for a day.

And remember
That our wings caressed the sun
Until, their lights dispelled,
We placid lay
Disposed in death.

So we drew breath
Until, our love begun,
We said farewell."

LOVE ON THE MOUNTAIN

And for each soldier travelling on the mountain, there is the persistent thought of woman; the encounter, the pursuit, trite words of love, the easement of passion, the sublimation of desire, or even the rare, celestial vision. The love of one is sentimental: as Hunt who dreams of paternity, the girl who is wife, the wife who is mother, the son who is his father's immortality. The love of another, of Evans for instance, is savage, wholly sensual, a *belle laide* creature to be described in terms whose very obscenity and filth provide a strange satisfaction; but even in this there may be a queer tenderness, the brutal fondness of a farmer for the old horse that is sent to the slaughterer, an unadmitted weakness, a weak compassion.

And some love is revengefully savage, repayment grasped from humanity for a man's humiliation at the hand of man, a cruel remorseless vice. There is more dark and slimy thinking, rather than talking, about this kind of love; and the measure of a man's satisfaction to be got from his thoughts is decided by the ferocity and scope of his imagination, his power to close the eyes on a wind-swept slope and conjure a cringing vision: perversion, degradation, but still called love in a soldier's vocabulary which lacks altogether the word of love.

There is love that is savagely romantic in the feeling, the surge of universal ripeness and maturity; the elements, the season, the eager flesh all ripe and falling into their hour of love and fulfilment. This is the

lusty sort of love that is spoken of frankly by those who find in it their satisfaction. This is the flesh rejoicing, untrammelled by argument and analysis, detached from morals or forbiddings, reasonably tender for it is happy and not wholly selfish. Robinson, Brown, Owen, Murphy will talk of love in the hayfield, love by the cut corn, love in the barn with the rain dripping on to the roof, as casually as they recall their evening beer in the village inn. But they are silent about the sharing, the mutual content, the ultimate repose. It was a simple beauty that needs no comment, for its simplicity concluded the experience.

But such sweaty, earthy love would not satisfy a man like Corporal Barnes who required a fragile, porcelain trinket to handle with care and to recall with delicate pleasure. It was a nicely balanced, nicely staged affair, carried through without fumbling or embarrassment. The mere repetition of physical relief, however mutual the experience, was no sort of fulfilment for Corporal Barnes. There had to be the flavour of intrigue, the calculated perfume, the elements themselves in reasonable order. It had to be beautiful.

But however he has his love, savage or tender, in moonlit stubbles or shaded lights, to the rhythm of a lewd whisper, a waltz or a ballad, the soldier recalls it in the lonely hour, the time inept for love, when darkness holds fear, the wind cuts and the rain should drench the keenest furnace. There are passages about love in the book that Hunt is writing, for the thought of love is a mental pulse that will not be stilled to order.

"The moon is big and heavy," whispers Robinson; "The corn is cut," whispers Brown. "But we were lovers of the cornfield," sighs Robinson; "and we were sweethearts of the moonlit woods," cries Brown, "And we," says Hunt as he scribbles easily at last, "we were lovers of wedlock and all the world was fairly ours, for

we were bedded in the world, part of the world, twin hills, twin trees welded in one root to an entanglement of branches. Our branches intertwine," he whispers
Yours and mine;

And the ivy of our love
On our vital juices throve
Bound with turkshead, knot and splice,
Bound us in a sombre clasp,
Wound an intricate device
Cast us in a deft design.

So our sighs must intermingle
Teardrops join the seeking flow,
The single rivulet
Athwart our loin.

Two in one and one from two,
And none can say
This bole or bark is me,
This interplay of lissom limbs
Touching ecstatically
Is you.

And as nightfall lingers
Until her fingers tap
At our love-woven loveliness,
Until her soft airs lap
Our folded thighs
And implicate our sighs:

Then groans desire in swollen spate,
In fire uprisen from the native wine
Of our sweet flow of sap;

Inseparably sweet design
We cast this seedling,
Thine and mine.

Thus each man thinks of love in his own way, some in savage obscenities, some in trivial ballad, some in trite and common verse; but each man thinks of love. And this Hunt puts into his notebook.

And he must write, too, of what each man has left to him here upon the mountain, of the lot that is taken and the little that is returned. This is a common argument that speeds in easy words from one to the other without dissent. And when it is begun even Hunt creeps from his private shelter, draws close to the fire that he may not miss the quick reply, or the chance to interpose a comment. For this is rich and easy talk on a matter of facts that are indisputably common. This is a pleasant source of future reflection.

For every soldier ponders on the hill the words that fall in hillside rest, in the rude shelter of an open camp, across the fire that lights the pinewood trunks and casts new shadows on to old walls and fallen masonry. And, as the fire jumps and the peat hisses beneath the mess-tin, beautiful, welcome words come from strange sources as familiar friends, For words are now neither objurgation nor expressions of disgust or hope, nor currency for action, but the jewels of a thought, a prayer, a cluster of feelings which each man has seen dangled in the dark, half beyond his vision, wholly beyond his touch. As they are tossed within his reach, as he may seize them to fondle, to explore, a longing is sometimes met, a doll from the top of a Christmas tree cut down and handed to the anxious child.

Around the topic of a soldier's lot the conversation will loop and flow like an easy river. There are no limits to the life and the relics it may carry, there is no design or colour that it may not fold within its deep reflections. "God—if there is a God . . ." someone will begin; "free trade is the answer, the old liberal party . . ." "But Plato said. . . ." "I like the wild western myself. . . ."

"Art," somebody will say, and instead of a muffled silence, the spring of thought will surge, the words trickle; "Art," they will say, thinking of Rembrandt or Landseer, thinking of Milton or Alice Duer Miller or Wilhelmina Stitch or Wystan Auden, thinking of Al Jolson or Toscanini; and thence will flow the argument, the shrewd remark, the platitude unarmoured on the mountain, the careful thought or tinsel notion; "Art . . ."

"A poem on the broken loveliness of the Mourne Mountains," says Murphy (long afterwards).

"Has become inept as the lark at reveille," Harper silently responds (in his hour of solitary thought).

"The song of both," says Corporal Barnes, "is a pathetic cheeping into ears that are filled with the curl of winds and the echo of torrents. For the significance of a mountain is now no more than the physical endeavour which took us over the crest; and the ecstasy of dawn is submerged in our preference for sleep and the shudder of our rude awakening. And the keen air that pierced us as we trod the summit of a hill, the spirit that spoke from spacious vistas laid before wind-worn eyes, were no more than a reminder of what we had lost, commanding our task ever more urgently, so that we might hasten our return to the lowlands where we once belonged."

"The universal truths," says Robinson, "are nothing to the weariness of boredom."

"And the fears of eternity," says Owen, "cannot touch the terrors of a missed leave."

"The contents of a brown stew," says Murphy, "are more precious than the perfume of tame flowers; and all the glories of immortal song would not buy from me my packet of Woodbines."

"Yet art is something that we dare not fail to covet," says Hunt (noting the conversation), "some search we

dare not leave, because we cannot guess the treasure that we may be missing."

"Art is not ours, is not for such as us," says Owen.

"Art," says the sergeant-major who may not be directly contradicted, "is abundantly for all, is created from what there is of God in man; and from the moment of its creation becomes the property of the human race; a solemn warning . . ."

"A warning not to lean out of the carriage window," says Barnes the communist, "nor to step on to the platform while the train is still in motion. The warning of a movement which is not always obvious, is easily forgotten. A reminder of movement, that what seems static is stirring, is risen; for art is revolt, a bloody revolution, a bursting out from the prison that we have made of our way of living."

"And revolt?" asks Hunt.

"Revolt is change overdue and obstructed. Revolt is a stoppage overcome, a breathing resumed, a way cleared for life to continue, to grow, to flourish. Revolt is the cure for grievous ills when life is endangered by the weight of our burdens. This revolt is art . . ."

"An escape from our burdens," suggests Harper.

"No, no!" says Barnes violently. "No escape. Art is a throwing off of burdens, opposition, uprising, victory, it is movement, forward movement, I tell you. It is revolt."

"And our burden?" asks Hunt.

"Each man, each class of man," says Barnes, "has his own particular burden and revolts against it in the spirit of conquest most likely to be successful! Thus, each man's art reflects the nature of his burden and the power of his revolt."

"Our burden," says the sergeant-major, "is not evident but it is heavy. Its weight is compressed into small, deceptive spaces which often escape our immedi-

ate notice. We expect the spectacular ills of death and danger, but are unprepared for those minor ailments whose sum may prove too grievous. The burden is unequal, heavier for some than for others. For the young and the adventurous it is not hard; for soldiering is not of necessity hard. . . ."

THESE WE TAKE WITH US

"SOLDIERING," said Jones, the subaltern, interrupting and speaking precisely with words chosen in long deliberation. "There is this to be said about soldiering." And everyone listened attentively, for it was not often that Jones spoke words other than those of encouragement or command. His voice was low, and the effort to catch each syllable of what had clearly been so carefully considered drew the listeners into confederacy: one could not pay such heed without admitting respect and a measure of agreement. One could not withhold respect from Jones whose great, bowed, silent figure led the way upon the hill with such perpetual skill and certainty. For Jones was always certain in his commitments, sure in his slow, deliberate calculation. Jones in his silence was an entirely admirable man. Strength came from his eyes, his movements, his compassion and his calm. Calmness came from the rhythm to which he conducted his life. His living was all rhythmical, a steady, even, powerful sequence of curves to whose time-beat his thought and passions, the breathing of his mind and heart, were carefully adjusted. For Jones, action was necessary; but all action was timed to the rhythm of some steady command which came from an unknown will. For Jones, thought was necessary; but his thought was no leaping, struggling creature, no tropic bloom or

rapid-shooting annual. Thought was a sturdy slow-growing plant which blossomed rarely, into a thoughtful speech. The rest of us, sensing this, paid heed to the colour and texture of the blossom, noted its mild perfume, observed, as botanists, the structure of its steady growth.

"Soldiering is quite fun," said Jones, "and most salubrious—for the adolescent, but just hell for the man who has started to construct his life, chosen his work, acquired a part of his skill, built his house, found his wife and bred his children. It deprives the adult civilian of every personal right which the State has taught him to regard as the essence of its constitution and the purpose of democracy. The statesman will not appear to recognise, and the professional soldier will never comprehend and so can never admit, that there is no radical difference between the citizen-soldier and the citizen-felon committed to gaol for some grievous misconduct. In fact, for a man with a meditative turn of mind, the privacy of a cell is easily preferable to the indignity of a barrack-room."

The worst part of war is not death and destruction but just soldiering; the worst part of soldiering is not danger but nostalgia; and the worst part of a soldier's nostalgia is the lack of intimacy, the lack of privacy, and the deprivation of the rights of self-determination and ownership.

This loss of the intimate activities and passivities of human life is a pain suffered in vastly differing degrees by the various categories of men and soldiers. Many are, by their normal habits, independent of this refuge; and they, of course, do not suffer at all by their dispossession. On the other hand are those who regard the ultra-companionship of a wife, and the close interlocking of their lives with the life of a woman, as their source of moral courage and their only means to tranquillity.

Such persons, when herded into an army, find themselves deprived of strength and bereft of virtue.

The lack of privacy is in its turn a hardship for some and a boon to others. The majority of men suffer keenly from the cruel indignities of its absence; they can neither meditate upon their sorrows and fortify themselves with the logic of existence, nor summon their souls to aid their recuperation from the buffets of society. But, strange as it may be, there are some who have a horror of solitude and a repugnance for their own company, and these must delight in the military corporation.

The right of self-determination, not recognised in the army once the shilling is accepted, has been so frequently denied that its loss is truly felt only by those who have absorbed the teachings of democracy. There are many who like to be told exactly what to do; there are others who regard the liberty of personal choice as essential to the enjoyment of living. Some, who are eager to accept responsibility for the behaviour of their fellows, will take none insofar as their own thoughts and actions are concerned: they are perfect Germans and ideal subjects for any army. The ordinary Englishman wishes neither to interfere with others nor to be interfered with himself. He has no ambition for leadership, and his only desire for power is in the security which it supposedly entails.

But the rights of ownership are sacred to everyone. His house, his garden, his bed-sitting-room, his favourite chair, his row of books, or the tools of his trade, must be unquestionably his own to lose or lend, barter or cherish, according to his sole inclination. The manifestation in the army of this human instinct is the petty theft which prevails but which is known by a kindlier name. It is another instance of unnatural vice provoked by unnatural circumstance. For the soldier is

ruthlessly stripped of personal possessions and burdened with government property. Nothing that he takes with him to war is his own by choice: nothing is his own in any sense except that he must pay for it in cash or punishment if it is lost or damaged. The pathetic little bundles which are sent to a widow are evidence of this state. There is a wallet, a photograph, a few letters and perhaps a watch, a cigarette case or a treasured pencil. These aids to a man's memories are all that a soldier may cherish. And memory itself is his only asset of worth.

So the soldier finds himself bereft of human dignity, often submitted to the whim of any natural bully, sometimes commanded by his moral, physical and mental inferiors, seldom possessed of military ambition, denied the choice between right and wrong, deprived of love and hope, and left with only his recollections. These become infinitely precious, for they alone are his intimates. They can never be stolen away. They enable the past to redress the present and to kindle hope for the future.

Memories are curiously independent of predictable values, and it is not the gold and jewellery that sparkle through the darker rainstorms. A common evening by the river quite often outshines a royal greeting, while a cup of tea in the wind-blown twilight may provide more lasting refreshment than the wedding breakfast. Perhaps all people specialise in their recollections, some hoarding up their social triumphs, their scoops on the Stock Exchange or Tote, their feats of sport or of physical prowess. But others, who have never been able to judge the importance of success, go in for worthless oddments which accumulate but dust and cobwebs and a musty odour of sentimental affection. These we take with us.

At these words, Hunt, suddenly remembering that he had in his pocket a trinket which he had carried with

him for all his long journey, crept from the communal fire back to the private shelter which he had made in his angle of the fallen wall. He relit his stump of candle and started urgently to write. A memory had returned with the urgency of desire; the remembrance of some suburban sanctuary, a Cornish grove, a Welsh valley, where he walked with his son on the eve of his departure. Whither his memories took him, none of us could know; but translated into my own language—the only language that I can speak with easy sincerity—they led him to a Cotswold valley in whose tranquillities he walked with a small boy to fish a beloved stream.

THE TWO-POUND TROUT

"I EXPECT you, too, will remember," he writes to his son, "the afternoon in June when France had fallen and you did not know that I was saying goodbye to you." The stream was in perfect order following a sudden and isolated night of rain which had cleared in the early morning. A few weeks before, the weeds had been cut for the mayfly season and had now grown again to islets, on either side of which the currents divided to run more swiftly over the naked gravel. Elsewhere, the islands had not yet emerged, were just breaking the water or were still below the surface so that the streams eddied and counter-ran above the sunken weed banks.

The sunlight rested all round us on the Cotswold hills but was particularly held in our valley, where the elms and fine chestnuts were still further ennobled by the solid retreats of shade, while the ash and willow were made more delicate by the sunny penetrations On the other side of the river, our village, built from the grey stone of the hillside, grew from the hillside in natural

forms, revived by the calm light on flaking limestone roofs, redesigned by the fragile clouds that rested on the hill behind. But this decoration, together with the steep hay-field and climbing wood at our backs, was only the frame and setting for the graceful arc of the valley and the bright flow of waters.

There were fly on the river but no fish came to feed while we were sitting by the stile and looking across to the village which, from this direction, was exquisitely piled upon the different levels of the opposite slope. In the foreground an extremely ugly summerhouse, of jaunty green and brown wood, befouled a piece of ground which had once been a dairy meadow but had lately become the pleasaunce of a private dwelling. We walked upstream in order to interpose a group of willows between this monstrosity and ourselves, and in doing so disturbed a large trout who broke the water with his fin and tail as he passed a ridge of weeds and set in troubled motion a number of smaller fish who were lying just below the surface. The further tumult caused by our action to evade the summerhouse was considerable: a rabbit fled from its bramble, a water-rat dived into the stream, a flock of wood-pigeons erupted from the neighbouring elms, a moorhen discharged across the water, its feet tearing at the surface, and a number of minute ducklings slid excitedly from the rushes. For a few moments the river, whose familiar silence is contained in the graceful blending of all its trivial sounds, lost composure. There was now no unity within the kingdom, and its tranquil life was broken down into individual beats: the secret conduct of living and the candid acts of agitation. The mechanics were apparent as in turn the various components were revealed. The drumming snipe, contralto birds and the constant bees provided unobtrusive accompaniment; while higher up the scale, lucid songs and whistlings

and the sundry squeaks inherent in a deep meadow became emphatic. Crawling insects, in their sturdy progress, were no longer completely silent, and even the wind-beats of a butterfly perceptibly disturbed the air.

This breach in the river stillness was quickly closed. Constituent claims resumed their place in the general harmony, and all declarations of disquietude and alarm were quenched in habitual peace. It was this, the maternal silence, that we both were seeking, the one consciously and the other by instinct; and we stood by the stream, refreshed when we needed assuagement, encouraged when we lacked fortitude. For the quiet of our valley was not a negative quality but that positive essence of repose which belongs only to tracts whose natural privacy is unimpaired but whose graces are contrived by man for his own solicitude. It is not found in the wild and desolate parts which retain their savage glories and flaunt their primitive splendour. It cannot clothe the hills where elatiòn and ecstasy may incite the languid; nor is it a property of the desert or plain where the joyful realisation of all human insignificance may often enrich the weak. It could never exist in the grandeur of fine cities or amongst the intimate curiosities of ancient towns. It belongs intrinsically to still gardens and quiet orchards and to valleys, to chosen valleys which harbour man and are shaded by the trees of his planting, whose meadows graze his cattle and whose hilly boundaries bear his crops. It is here that tranquillity dwells within the swift-moving waters.

Although this was the consolation that we sought for its silent healing, and this the repair that I needed from the bruises of military discipline and duty, it was not by itself a complete satisfaction. It was at least an entire antithesis of all that a soldier must suffer in secret; it imposed privacy, denied limitations, accepted the logical

sequence with generous abandon, and in particular declared the laws of timelessness and their application to the process of living. Its cure was a prescription from the Gods, its promise a balm and easement for the pains of servitude. But this was not enough, and in its perfection it required a sense of fulfilment. The time and place were so faultless in partnership that they must become important by some memorable occurrence: something that might in itself be trivial had got to happen in a notable way.

With this expectation, undefined but nevertheless implicit, we moved to the elderly willow which leaned across the river at the peak of the bend. As we gazed into the olive pool, you said: "He's down there in the roots where it's very deep." But the water was so swift and full of light that we could see no speckled back against the gravel and no mighty tail majestically waving in the current. Had he been there, he would most certainly have been disturbed by our search.

The fly were still hatching and were being carried past us by the devious routes of eddy and counter ripple, but the fish paid them no greeting nor displayed any promise of future interest. We stood in peace, watching casually for the first indication of a trout's appetite; the arrow-head graved on the surface of the river, the quaking roll of the stream as a fish slid upwards to review the passage of his food, or the least suggestion that a dorsal fin was cleaving the water. I believe I was looking in the opposite direction when you silently pulled at my coat, and I said "Hush!" quite without reason but, I suppose, catching your excitement. Not far upstream the afternoon sunlight flashed back to us in the growing circles, whence a young fly, newly hatched and drying its wings with an occasional feeble wriggle, had been sucked into the depths with scarcely a pucker in the complexion of the river. The widening rings spread and spread sur-

passing the weed-banks. Then the fish rose again, very quietly, self-possessed and sure of his technique, resolute but placid. Yet the great commotion caused in the depths as he dived downwards with his down-sucked prey effected a slow disturbance, a solemn movement and an emblem of vast dignity seldom seen in the upper reaches of that river. In ten years the Coln had not in these parts been visited by such splendour.

At the time we did not realise the honour done to us by the presence of such a fish in our waters. In a really good season we were fortunate to catch half a dozen trout of a pound or more, and the triumph of such occasions was too often dissolved in belated regret that our stream was the poorer and our expectation of a similar excitement more remote than before. It was clear from our earliest impressions that we had met a newcomer of unusual size; but a just recognition of his importance came only by gradual degrees during the hour that we were to spend in his company. He revealed to us at first his dignity and insouciance, later his arrogance and temper, and only at the end the full power and might of his serene maturity.

I had with me only the smallest seven-foot rod with a cast of the finest gut; but the fish lay well out in the stream and our immediate surroundings were clear of obstructions. It would have been proper to have studied the problem with some care, to have reviewed the local drifts of current, the position of the sun and direction of the faint breeze, and to have observed with precision the particular species of fly which he was choosing from the varied assortment that was floating past. But the influence of war is to impose a sense that the moment is brief and the chance pressing, and I hastened to crawl forward and put on to the stream the fly that I had casually selected when we first reached the river. I seemed to be fishing superbly; the line rustled gently

through the rings, the cast unfolded with delicate grace and the tuft of hackles dropped softly to ride the stream just where the certain instinct of an experienced angler judged that the lure would be most entrancing. I put the fly a foot above him, a yard above him, just over his nose, to this side of him, and on the edge of a tempting eddy in the stickle beyond his lie. I fished with perfection and exasperation, with one fly after another out of an extravagant series of boxes, but with no effect whatsoever. Now and again the world paused on its axle as it seemed that the trout moved to examine the latest choice that we were sending past him. Once or twice I struck as the dimple broke with its fringes rocking our fly, but each time it was a natural neighbour or some submerged insect that had been taken in preference to our artifice. Our selection of offerings grew more catholic and our invitations less cautious as it became clear that the trout received them with indifference and contempt, until at last I flopped on to the stream a great red-brown creature that resembled nothing ever seen upon our Cotswold waters. It landed with an uproar that should have sent the most innocent fish to the safety of the bottom, and might have been expected to warn a veteran from his feed for an hour or so of angry reflection. I had, indeed, risen to my knees in the certainty that the encounter could now never be joined, resigned to at least a memorable disappointment.

You squeaked first, and then I struck most fortunately late, and the reel gave one delicious wail before I realised that the trout had come in resolute temper at my inartistic bundle of feathers, that he had sucked it in with one tidal gulp and had plunged steeply downwards towards the nearest subaquatic forest. He shook his head and, with the fury of his strain, an ecstatic quiver of our slim rod travelled through the valley. He was fast in the weeds, spasmodically lashing at his

entanglement. It was for us a time of desperate anxiety and growing fear.

I believe I kept on saying: "Not a hope, not a hope, he's stuck in the weeds and we haven't a hope." And all you did to help was to jump up and down, as if you were doing physical exercises, crying "We must, we must, we must" as each moment the chances of fulfilment became clearly more distant,

It was then that for some raging fancy the fish whipped out of his hiding and came swiftly downstream to the more impenetrable weeds below us. I got in some line, hand over hand, but now the situation was still less favourable for the leaning willow prevented my following him down, getting below him, turning his head with the current, stopping his breath, stopping the water from passing through his gills and filling him up with the life to continue the struggle.

The despair that slowly fell upon us, draining our excitement in a dismal hemorrhage, increased as the strain on our line grew leaden, The fish was safe in the weeds with a bight of the cast about a handy root, and all his leisure to work his head from side to side until he rubbed out the hook, or wore away the gut, and left us with the rod sprung to nothing but a deadweight sunk deep at the bottom of the waters. We lowered the tip and pulled by hand upon the line; we strained sideways and leant dangerously across the willow to contrive a different direction; we threw sticks, shrubs and stones at the weed-bank where he was evidently hidden. And at last I handed you the rod and took off my shoes and trousers ready to go in after him.

At that moment the reel and you squeaked again together. Some fatal whim had tempted the fish to challenge us once more in the open water. As he sped across the stream you kept the rod tip up with admirable prudence, but I, not trusting you, grabbed at it, tripped,

fell, and we lay together involved in the rushes, struggling in the mud at the edge of the river.

And later, at the end of pulsing hope and miserable despair, the pendular emotions, we were again entangled, but this time with the landing net between us.

And finally, when the long, dark body leapt and writhed upon the bank, we pounced simultaneously upon him and nearly threw him back into the water in our efforts to consolidate our capture. These were scenes of outrageous indignity.

We weighed him on the spring balance, and he was over two and a half pounds—the largest fish that we had ever imagined could be found in our river.

It was of course a moment of joy, for this sense of fulfilment had been demanded by the perfection of the valley. But very shortly afterwards, before we had moved away from the trees on which the adventure had been based, we found ourselves silent in a strange impression of sadness which had fallen upon the occasion. It might have been the impending goodbyes that had to be said, or just the end of a glorious incident, that was the cause of our mutual grief; either was adequate. The time was come and something was done with. In all our lives we could not again share this perfect, thrilling, comical, tragic, triumphant experience. It was finally gone; and what was left was the knowledge that the essence of a past experience is in the understanding that the experience is past—for ever.

When we took out
The two-pound trout
The ultimate glory was achieved.
But afterwards we grieved
That the two-pound trout
Was no longer in the river.

"Yes," said Jones, the subaltern, "the two-pound trout will no longer be in the river when we come back to it.

But we think of it there, so I suppose it is always in the river."

"It will never again be in the river," said the sergeant-major. "It will live in the river which we have left, but not in the river to which we may return."

"And a good thing too," said Barnes, the communist corporal, "we have had our fill of old rivers."

"A good thing too?" Hunt asked. "But my son will be waiting by that river, trout or no trout."

"Your son will be waiting by the river to which you return," said the sergeant-major kindly; but Barnes laughed.

"He's very young to have a son that age," I said to the sergeant-major, as the thought struck me.

"He *has* no son," the sergeant-major answered.

"No son, sergeant-major?"

"Not yet, sir."

The conversation died with the fire which was no more renewed. We rested with an hour or so left before first-light when we had to resume our journey. The sergeant-major changed the sentries and, but for them and the wireless operator who manned his instrument, the company slept.

✧

"I'll give him another," said the medical orderly; "the needle's as filthy as hell."

"He shouldn't worry," said the sergeant.

✧

SEVEN DAYS' LEAVE

THE wireless operator was stationed close to the sheltered corner which Jones and I had chosen for our rest. The aerial, slim and bending to the night breeze—

all that was left of the winds that had banished daylight—pointed to a luminous cloud which concealed the risen moon. And as I watched the aerial with eyes closing in sleep, and thought with gratitude that at least it had disturbed me with no severe or questioning signal, a finger of light struck from the cloud, a vivid tongue of light pierced the darkness, licked the slender wand and from far across the mountains carried a message for me, the captain of the company.

"Sir, sir!" cried the operator, running towards me and waving the message.

I took it, and by my torch read the pencilled words, seeing at first the darkness lighten, seeing the spell collapse, the mountain tremble, shrink and fold itself to valleys, seeing the rude rock and overhanging crags shudder and change to the delicate foliage of a noble elm, a cluster of elms and chestnuts spaced by a river, led to a bed of gentle withies by a sleeping pool.

"Seven days' leave," I cried to the sergeant-major, and the sergeant-major called the news to the sleeping company who woke, rubbing their eyes, and slowly assembled beside me with incredulous whispers.

"Seven days' leave," they whispered, "no, no, they taunt us."

"Seven days' leave," said Jones, the subaltern, speaking slowly, his great body bowed before the moon, shoulders hunched, feet wide-planted on the hillside. "Seven days' leave," he said, puzzled and curious. "Seven days' leave is a rumour I have heard before only to be denied later. Seven days' leave is a poem and an answer to a prayer, and a promise, even an order. This must be understood for there is much to be done, much to be recovered, restored, completed. I have to know" (he was now almost speaking to himself) "the depth, the flow, the current of this shining promise. I have to know the source and destination of its stream, the strength and

vagaries. I have to know, to estimate, to understand
The set and drift of this report
Whose adult spate
Must lap my private land.

And I must know
Wherefore the rapid echoes say
That I am free;
And wherefore vows the voice
That I may go away from the precarious
self-possession
On which I desperately balance;
That I may go
To the safe, substantial distance
Where flow my reassuring rivers;
That I may go,
No matter whither or by which way,
But free to make a conscious choice
To take a personal decision:
That I may go.

I must go then to seek
For what I have left behind
For what I have cast by the way,
For what I have lost as a child,
For what I have half designed and since
delayed:
For the untouched cheek
And the logical mind
Of a maiden day.
For the secret trove
Of love preserved and buried vision:
A decision yet untried
With a waiting bride.

I must go to recover
The kinder whisper of night
And the dawn delight of a lover.
I must seek her breath in the frozen
morning,
The tap on the pane of her hand.
I must stand by the murmur of death,
Hear only the light, see only the call
Of the living pall in her ecstasy of
bequest.

I must take but to give,
I must live but to die,
I must rest.

I must go to discover
The pride and release
Of mild achievement long denied,
Of a trivial sentiment aptly fulfilled,
The wilful plea of importunate ease
Quietly stilled
By familiar peace.

I must look for all that I know,
For the nursery book,
For the languid thought and the slow
word;
I must search for the creaking board
in the fragrant bedroom;
The crack in the ceiling, the stained
floor,
The obstinate door,
The frail chair, the delicate table,
The gloom of an odorous passage;
The trite message
Of a prim bloom on the seasoned wall;

The joyful cluster of flowers whose face
I pass on my walk to the post;
A trim drive and the cut grass
And the lost hours of leisured talk
In the gracious shade.

No longer delayed,
I must go to discover the place
Where my passion stayed."

"I, too," I said when Jones had finished speaking, "must recover the perfume of an old passion. It is a slender thing, perhaps no more than a brittle dream of rest and restoration. But I go, I suppose, to all that has been left by others to be cherished by me, and to what must be left by me to be cherished by my sons. I go to something that is infinitely refreshing in a way that is hard to express: you might call it a song, or a song's source where the notes of a melody are first assembled. You might call it a dream for it is the reflection of a tranquil life; or you might call it a poem, a hope, a prayer, a lost friend, a lost lover, a waiting bride:"

For there my river sweetly, sweetly twists
Within her cloven hills. There she distils
A pastured simple. There persists
Her proven cure for military ills.

And there my river gently, gently swelling
From fairest spring to fair substantial flood
Hath with precision cast a graceful dwelling,
Carved an incision in a stately wood.

Thus: within cloistered trees, beside the waters,
Upstream the village and astride the vale,
Her sylvan jests and cultivated laughters
Permit my private harbour to prevail.

Here, when each day is purposed by the stream,
A week provides the refuge of a dream.

"I dream of different harbours," said Barnes, the communist, "I dream of light in darkness, of argument in light, of music in argument and of colour in music. . . ."

"Yes," said Owen, "like hell," said Owen, who disliked the corporal. "You dream of this and that, you talk of this and that, but where do you go to? You, a communist, go back to your capitalist friends, to the rentiers you are always carping about—the masters who pay my wages—to the expensive lights, the fancy pictures and music, the amateur tarts, the talk, talk, talk about all that you haven't experienced and can't ever understand."

"I go to a city," said Barnes equably, for he never minded a little personal objurgation. "I go to all the corners of joy and leisure held within solemn walls. I may not understand, but I go, all the same, to my dream of thronged faces, of people, common people, talking, dancing, singing in adversity until the clear joy of their shrill, unmusical voices, the smell of their bodies, the cloud of their breath on the cold air, the coarse laugh, the drunken sob, the catch in a vow of love, the deception and meanness, the ribald courage, all these are woven into a song of the people, a logical song of purpose, a reasoned song of hope. . . ."

"Talk, talk and bloody talk," said Owen.

"I go to a place," said Barnes persistently, "from whose shelter I may join this song of my dream; from whose preserves my voice may be lifted without caution; from whose streets and avenues the fears and tremors, that grow on the mountain and have to be suppressed on the mountain, may escape in all that may be said and all that can be heard and all that is discussed in leisured argument. I go to relief and to the liberties of common people. . . ."

"I tell you," said Owen, "there are no common people

in your place of vice and luxury. . . ."

"That is a just remark and a fair criticism," said Barnes, who can never deny a common man—and there is none more common than Owen; "and there, I have to agree, is where a man of logical thought admits his own illogicality. I go to the London of elegant history, of lights and leisure and spacious proportions because, in the short time that will be my own, I must go to the place I know simply because I know it. From this familiar refuge, the truth that a man has to seek becomes evident, because the refuge itself is familiar and secure. It is hard to explain; but a man, like an army, must have a secure base whence his senses may explore and his mind consider the unknown, the obscure and the doubtful. In such circumstances, he can see how hot the sun is, how wild the wind can blow; he can love and find relief in a delicate, temperate passion; he can judge the peculiar beauty of a red tulip painted against a red curtain, the power of colours allied in argument, the rhythm of colour disposed on canvas in a work of joy or sorrow; he can rejoice in the passion of symphonic sound, the strings swelling and joined, one by one, by each enlisted instrument; he can understand the balanced yearning and the wild restraint of the fierce dancer, he can spin and soar with the dancer and find a moment of oblivion when colour, movement and music are compounded into a brief emotion which is in no other way expressible. But I do not go to the painter's studio, nor camp in the Albert Hall, nor bivouac at Sadler's Wells for these enjoyments. I go to the place that I know whence I can find refreshment in all that is refreshing, whether it be the song, the dance, the trivial love, the sympathetic love, or the pulse of the common people."

"I tell you," said Owen doggedly, for he was not a man who could be bothered to listen more than once in

a dispute, "I tell you that the common people do not dwell in the lights but in the shadows of a great city. Their voice is not in the dance and the music but in the clamour of the docks and the factory, the grumble of the pithead. What do you think you will hear from the brightness and the ease of your elegant city refuge?"

"Maybe you're right," Barnes answered; "I only know where I am going, what I am seeking, and why I must find it. From Chambers in Albany,
From a flat in Saint James,
From a small house in the Lowndes Square district,
From the rooms of friends with fashionable names,
Of a cousin who entertains the merry relict
And the erudite young lady:

Thence, to the shaded light
And syncopated beat of sliding feet
And sweetest fright of chest to breast
In vinous dances:
Such overture entrances
To passioned love and love's release
And lover's rest
From soldier's fears and fancies.

Or, amongst crowding, unconcerted hearts,
To the lovely hush
Before the curtain parts,
Before the footlights blush
And players for my leisure
Contrive that pleasure.

And when the wilder beat begins,
The strings delight, the ballerina spins,
The spirits flight on orchestrated wings
To coloured chant and fluted tap:
Then doth release
Of chafed desire and amorous dis-ease
Conspire to wrap the quiver of a soul
In blessed stole.

Here, in tranquillity regained, in confidence renewed,
The mind-beat unpursued and unconfined,
Security sustained by a caress:
Then may a man redress his fortitude,
And from such harbour sail once more
Repaired for War!"

"But I," said Hunt timidly, "go to my son. I will take him all that I have written in my exercise book; I will lay it beside him for my posterity. I go to the son who is not yet born, to the mother who carries my son. She holds my heart in her belly, my own breathing, my prayers, the life I have given. And I may speak to the mother of my son, whispering as she sleeps, to sleep more soundly. And I may lie beside my beloved

Heavy with my child,
And watch her, hear her dreaming
While the morning breaks,
Until she wakes to take my hand;
And I may understand
How subtly undefiled and secretly unmoved
By her part beside me,
My beloved
Carries my heart.

Then to her heart in silent gesture
My heart may whisper:

"The child in your womb has stirred;
You still dissemble sleep, but sleep deferred,
Your head turns and your eyelids tremble
As, half awoken,
You think I have spoken.

"Your thoughts perceive me,
Conclude my message sent.
I never spoke, beloved, only my love
Sped from my heart and wove
One more entanglement
That you might not leave me.

"And in your silent lips I see
The child leap;
And in the pale eclipse of sleep
I see
Your dreams, awakened to tranquillity,
In this, their hour, disclose
The tremble of a rose.

"The child rests again and you may sleep
Maternal and complacent,
While I adjacent
In quiet quests my vigil keep.
Beloved sleep."

"So he is to have a son," I said to the sergeant-major, "The son to whom he has written, of whom he talks and in whom he perceives his immortality. It is an unborn son. His wife. . . ."

"He has no wife" said the sergeant-major.

"His girl, his woman?"

"He has no girl," said the sergeant-major, "he would blush and stammer at the thought of a girl. He would tremble at the touch of a woman. He is young. He has never lain with a woman."

"Then where does he go?" I asked the sergeant-major.

"He goes, sir," said the sergeant-major, taking a deep breath, "where we all go: to the plains we have left behind where there is still sunrise; to the moment of dawn when beauty breathes and the heart pauses in silence. For us, that is all that we need: the pause, the silence, the retreat. For here on the mountain there is no sunrise, no restoration, no daily promise nor birth of beauty. That is the constant dirge of the universal soldier: For us there is no sunrise,

No morning tide of consequential pause
Nor breathless cause for intimate compassion;
No sweetly solemn hour
And no perennial surprise
At the triumphant ride of daybreak
And the ingenious fashion of a waking flower,
The shaking foliage languorous with sleep,
The trembling take
Of lovely twists in swiftly lightened stream
Beneath the session of her dawnering mists:

None, none of this
Is it permitted us to keep;
None, none of this
Lives in our morning dream.
For with the mourning cry
Each day we die.
And so it may be seen
Each soldier in his own and several way
Seeks his return to these
Reflections of a previous day.

Seeks, too, a brief release,
A questing peace from the convivial display
That must be lent to excellent friends
Whose forced society and similar disguise
And gross variety of temperament
Require a mutual compromise to please.

Seeks, too, a quiet escape
From the distorted shape of limbless days
And mutilated ways;
From the perpetual association
With superior and inferior
In calculated station
And at a stipulated distance;
Seeks, too, escape from sufferance of the weak
That they may be more able
To sustain the brave;
From the interminable same
Kaleidoscopic scene
Through whose opacity we probe in vain
For some compassionate decision,
For some extraordinary vision which might save
In whole, in part,
A soldier's heart,
A soldier's soul.

For we have lost what once we made
And we are lost to weeping widows
And we have forgotten that we once forgot
That once we had the liberty to say:

"I think I'll go to the country today,
I think I'll walk in hopeful meadows
But I'll not
Stroll this evening by the casual river
Nor loiter in the chestnut shade,

But I'll later go in at leisure
Through the uncut woods
To a light dinner of my favourite foods."

Now we may see again the sunrise,
Now we predict the sunrise
And recall the past for the immediate future;
At last we may ensure
The alienable right
To all the perfumes and the sighs
Of what we loved and left
Bereft of lover.

Softer than dawn and swifter than night
We shall be gone to recover
A lost delight."

"A lost delight," they murmured amongst themselves, all the soldiers in the company gathered on the side of the mountain. "Before the dawn, swifter than the night that comes so swiftly and stays so long, on feet more eager, more soft than the tread of sunrise, we may be gone to recover a lost delight."

But even as they whispered, the finger of light struck once more from the moonlit cloud; the tongue of light licked at the aerial; and the operator, running towards me, cried, "Sir, sir," and held out a message. "No leave," he cried, "our leave is cancelled; all leave is stopped."

"Just as I thought," said Jones. "It doesn't do to believe things." He looked at the sky: "It will be twilight soon," he said. "We'd better be packing."

The rest of the company remained silent, woken from a dream or trying to awake from a nightmare. They stood helpless and confused, huddled together, at this moment no longer soldiers, but men of the plains lost upon the mountain.

"Get cracking now," said the sergeant-major; and the

voice of the trumpet called to them again, as the sergeant-major spoke with the voice of authority. "Soldiers, Fall-in," said the trumpet a trifle derisively:

"Soldiers fall-in
And once again
Your ranks regain
Your bodies train
Your exercise begin!"

And the soldiers formed up into ranks, took off their coats and started their exercise. "That's fine," said the trumpet, producing his loudest blast:

"Do this, do that," said the trumpet,
Run, leap; this shows
Your physical mechanics.
On your toes!
Up, down and up!
Your arms extend
Knees bend,
Together all.

And at the end expose
Your implements of war . . .

ADON OLAM (LORD OF THE UNIVERSE)

As usual when the trumpet spoke, the elements appeared to be in alliance with the voice of authority. But on this occasion the unpleasant notes came, not from the heart of a storm, but from an unnatural silence. The

men automatically obeyed the ludicrous commands, which seemed no more irrational than any other of the trumpet's injunctions, but which this time rolled thunderously away across the desolate hillside to strike the lowered clouds in a single and solitary wave of ill-humour. The sound was set in impressive stillness, for the night wind had dropped just before the first suggestion of morning dusk. Then, when the last notes had fallen and were quivering to rest, a clear and startling echo struck back from the eastern peak towards which the company were about to resume their journey. "And at the end expose
Your instruments of war," cried the trumpet; but when this final note had been buried in an aggressive silence, the silver call of an echo replied from across the valley; *"Directed at a star,"* it cried, And at the end expose
Your instruments of war
Directed at a star . . .

I do not know why, but we all looked towards the sergeant-major who stood facing the east, his head raised and his body tightened, his lips keeping pace with the words of the echo as if they, too, were spoken through the medium of his voice. The men were moving briskly again, lacing up their boots, buttoning jackets and pulling on their equipment as the sergeant-major continued speaking, still in the silver tones of the echo, now in a voice that was neither his own, nor the blast of the trumpet, nor the whisper of the flute, but might have been the song of a star, of a star falling behind the mountains: "It seems," said the sergeant-major, speaking
for all of us,
"It seems we soldiers climb a weary crest
Balanced on rugged shoulder of the hill;
At either breast, a precipice
Whose chasm threatens

And whose abyss beckons to the dark release
Of facile peace.
Nor dare we cease our curious behaviour.
This terminable climb
Through cumbrous time,
For Hark!
From this, our unforgiving crest,
Some deft, indomitable will
Commands our labour and forbids our rest,
Some Kingly will."

And as the wind that preceded the first tokens of dawn struck our faces, a voice that was truly kingly and splendid spoke in notes that filled the mountains with glory and our hearts with resolution. It seemed to us, over-wrought as we were, that the voice of angels answered the voice of authority who had spoken through the trumpet. It seemed that some impersonal voice, or choir of voices, called to us in this moment of despair and weakness, and in ancient and formal terms older than the mountains themselves, spoke of the human dignity and the human power that were ours to summon because of the image in which we had been created.

"These stars our wings disperse."
An angel said.
"And from the dead
Jehovah cried
I AM WHAT I AM.

And we replied
'*Adon Olam*'—Lord of the Universe!

Thus from the hilly depths
Aslant the outcrop steps

The mountain temples ring
On tilted peak, in cloistered glade
Ecstatic and elated
The angels speak, the choirs sing
To trumpet chant, in holy verse:

Lord of the Universe
Who reigned before aught was created,
When by His will all things were made
Then was His name proclaimed King.

And hereafter
When all shall have ceased
He, tremendous, alone shall reign
Who was and is and ever shall be
In glory.
He is One
And there is no second
To compare or to contrast with Him.
He is without beginning and without
end,
To Him belong strength and dominion.

And then it seemed that Jones, the subaltern, was speaking, his great body straightened because his head was upturned to the Eastern clouds where the sky was a shade lighter and a rift once more revealed the morning stars. His voice was as usual, quiet, persistent and sure, as he spoke words which he had duly considered.

"Lord of the Universe" (he said)
Who reigned before aught was created:
Inter-related in Thy holy plan
Are the elemental spaces,
The inter-stellar spaces

And the whimperings of regimented man.
For by comparison, the former with the latter,
What can it matter
If our trivial tasks
Oppress the spirit and suppress the light
Masked within witless faces
Of those who toil the night?

And in continuation of this question, which had been answered before it was asked, I found that my own lips were speaking: "With this admitted," I was saying,

"With this admitted
Lord of the uncreated,
Is it debated
That in the cacophony of passing time
Our cry to Thee referred
Cannot be heard, cannot be pitied?

O Lord sublime,
Is it debated
That in the immensity of the inconceivable
Immeasurable, unbelievable
Inexpressible travail of Thy slow discourse,
Whose words dropped as worlds descending
Spring from an imponderable source
Whose no beginning has no ending
But whose pause,
A breath caught in divine tranquillity,
Is the passing of eternity. . . ."

The words, not mine, for I had asked only the first question before some other voice from among us had interrupted with his own urgent cry, were carried from one man to another throughout the company:

"Lord of the uncreated" (Hunt was calling)
Is it debated
That is this and this and this,
This madness to consider,
That whence we come and whither may be bound
Are thoughts too microscopic to be found
With elements
Whose substance is sufficiently substantial
To exist?

But now Barnes was crying, now the sergeant-major, now Jones again, and now my own lips speaking their involuntary words:

O God who made man in His own image (said Barnes)
And added melody to tear the heart from man,
To trail it to celestial mirage
Of His exotic, trembling plan,
The chaotic glory of the world
Before the stars disposed,
Before the world began. . . .

Thou, with Thine ear disclosed (said another),
Thine eye unfurled
Made Shakespeare, Michelangelo, Mozart,
Made the violin and the flute
Whisper as aspens in my heart
Shiver as willows in my soul;
Made too the mute and sunset seraphim
Who stole in sculptured valleys,
Tarried in languorous dispute
Of even stanzas,

Or strayed in infant billows
Of pellucid line:
All these were Thine.

O Thou (Barnes spoke again)
Who made the tender fingers
Stray keenly on the strings.
The hand that lingers
On lovely violin;
Who made all man to love, to sin, to know
The fleshly glow, the glory of paint,
The glory of sensuous substitute;
Who made the sensitive nerve;
The sweet dispute
Of the chisel and the chiselled curve;
The suffering passage of the pen
Obedient to the poet's brain,
To the poet's lost complaint,
To the poet's lament. . . .

But now the words were lost in the morning wind and gave place to windy silence and to the casual voice of the soldier who gave orders or asked a question. Camp was struck, the men were formed up and the company moved off in its military pattern. It was still dark, although the hour of morning twilight had clearly arrived and the sky ahead was lighter than the sky behind us.

MORNING

MORNING was approaching, and Smith could see from his vantage point that there remained but one strenuous climb to be accomplished before the last crest was reached and the way led downhill, opening its lips to the valley that they sought. Smith could not tell what

lay in the valley, nor could discern the wide lakes and waterways, rivers and streams and rich meadows, fertile fields or vast cities which might be held within its folds, for all were covered by the mists of early morning. The company of men was moving easily after its brief rest, and as the morning grew so their minds opened with the flower unfolding to the day. Although their speech was wordless, the current of those unspoken words evoked by a thought refreshed, ran lightly from one to another.

"When this is over," said Jones silently, "when the last crest has been passed and the last descent has led us back to a valley, I shall not rest in the pleasures of a lowland plain. I must recover myself in some absolute solitude where no man can touch me with thought or gesture. I must leave all that is unjust, unkind and illogical in the human world to seek a lonely place where only one man disturbs the solitude. And there I may become familiar with one specific person. For I am tired, tired," he said, "and I must rest in my own presence, where I may consider in quietude all that I have done and suffered in company with others. For there are years to be spent in that quiet thought which may be governed by the past and by all that my ears, my eyes, and my senses will perceive of a tranquil present divested of man, released from the clasp of human passions. I shall learn from the elements, these same elements that embrace me on the mountain, and I shall be taught by the high wind, the lowered clouds, the wild flowers, the birds and the timid creatures. I must rest."

"I cannot seek or accept solitude," said Hunt, "for I must find a wife and a home, a woman who will take my love to give me comfort and to bear me sons. This home, preserved for my personal peace, will be the harbour where I may rest. For I am tired from longing un-

assuaged, from the fear of death and the timid hoping for survival. I am tired from these long days of public effort, this constant toil upon the mountain. In the valley we are to regain I shall find the repose of love."

Owen laughed. "Jesus," he said, "no family for me, no interference. The world is to mind its business and I'll mind mine. I'll work if I have to work, and I'll be given food and beer and a girl or two and a little pleasure: dogs under the white lights, the horses and a quiet gamble, a game to watch, a week by the sea in summer and a morning in bed each week. But no interference, for I will be my own master; and no fighting except of my own choice. If there are others that want to fight, I'll have no part in the battle. Not again," said Owen, "once bitten and shy forever."

"So said your father," said the sergeant-major. "Those were your father's words when he came to the threshold of his rest to unlace the boots that were caked with Flanders mud and to throw those boots into the dark corner. He was weary and could sit by the kitchen fire and watch his son who had stepped in his absence to the edge of manhood. He was tired and he rested and sought neither fame nor success, money nor power, but only the needs of a quiet evening. Thus," said the sergeant-major, "you were called to the mountain."

"Are we not to be taught by the past?" asked the sergeant-major. "Are we to seek the rest we have earned, to sit by the fire through the long afternoon that we choose to call evening, to wait for the coming of night? No!" said the sergeant-major. "When we come to the plain there is work to be done, there are towers to be built and spires to be furnished. It is no end, but only a fierce beginning. When we come to the plain we have earned the right to begin the labour that our sons must continue."

"We have not come to the age of weariness and rest,"

said the sergeant-major. "We are old in toil but young in effort. We, with our sons beside us, are to build the future of peace and justice, and utter the promise of truth."

"The sergeant-major is right," said Corporal Barnes. "Right, by God, but he has only told a half of the story. We are not only to build but to destroy. Before we can build the new we must destroy the old utterly and forever. Never again shall the pompous man, the man of success and greed for money and power, enter the garden that was made for the common man in his God's image. Don't you see," said Barnes in anger, "that we must fell the dying tree and haul the roots of decay from the good earth. We must clear the soil of weeds before we can plant the flower, and remove the rubble before we can build the city. We are not to build on the past that is dead, but on our visions that have come to life. We have so much to build without bricks," he said wildly, "and so much to suffer without reward or promise. There is no promise beyond the word of a common man who was made in the image of God and put to work in a garden. He was therefore good without greed, lacking ambition. For there is no ambition in the peace of God."

"That's it!" said Barnes. "That is our task in the plains: to clear the ground for the planting of a new garden planned to the pattern that was once God's whim."

"Yes," said Smith with a sigh, "Barnes is right, but the world of our dreams is distant and must pass through many dreams before our sons or their sons or their grandsons may waken. The world must go forward from the dream of avarice to the dream of God which is scarcely remembered. Long long ago we slipped from the hill of holy endeavour until we sped from God on the wings of new contrivance and fled from his love on the wheels of invention. There has been more love on

this mountain born of our suffering than was ever found in the plain of our leisure. Our sons in the plain which we approach must, for their understanding, lift their eyes to the hills we have travelled. On those cloud-capped battlements they may view the freedom conceived in a soldier's captivity."

THE END

"NOT me! Not me!" cried Smith, as he lay on the backward slope of the crest. In his mind there was no knowledge beyond pain, darkness, and terror. No faculty remained except the power to suffer, no passion except the fear of death.

"Here," said Owen, "for Christ's sake let's beat it."

"Is the captain finished?" Robinson asked.

"The whole ruddy lot," Owen answered; "Mr. Jones, the captain, sergeant-major, Barnes and Hunt, all in the basket."

"We made a lovely job of the bridge," said a voice. "They'd have liked to have seen it."

"They can't be moved," said the medical orderly, "they've gone, most of them."

"Come on," said Owen, "it's almost morning."

"Morning?" Smith whispered, in the last phrase of his vision. "My May morning, the hour where I may linger? And I shall, forever" (he said, repeating an old promise), "be left at this hour in the blossom of morning, held in the flower at my window, wrapped in the woken world.

"Me, you chose," said Smith with his last fragment of thought, "and I am ready for oblivion."

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